

BONUS: Excerpt From Alice Borchardt's The Silver Wolf

REALMS OF FANTASY

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the Dead

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Secret**

By Sherwood Smith

**Demon
of the
Lost City**

By J. Michael Matuszewicz

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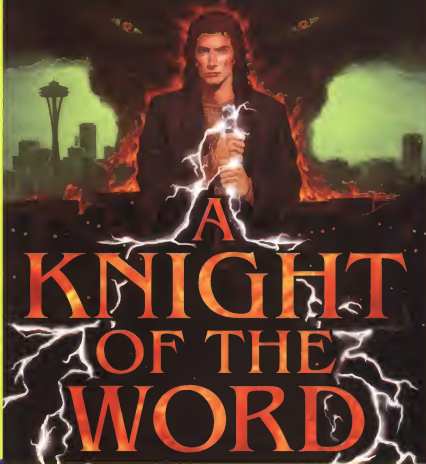


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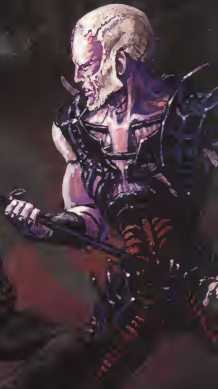
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COVER: After battling her way to popularity on TV, Xena is now starring in a collectible card game from Wizards of the Coast. See page 80. LEFT: Fantasy artist Brom shows off his slick and scary subjects in this issue's Gallery. See page 74.

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**DEL
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And the Survey Says; Part II.

LAST ISSUE I TREATED YOU ALL TO MY personal, in-depth analysis of the survey replies I'd received to date. I expected to receive more replies after the editorial was written and thought that there might be varying viewpoints in those letters whose authors took their time and *really* thought about the question. I was wrong—while I did receive some 80 (!) more email replies and another bunch of snail mail replies, you were still all saying pretty much the same thing the first group did. I won't go into that again here—for those of you who missed the last issue (shame!) a personal, in-depth analysis is available on the editorial page. Therefore, I thought I'd use this column to let you speak to one another. As I read the replies, I marked those that struck me as particularly interesting and well-thought-out (and a couple that struck me as the opposite!) for just this use.

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

I have some ideas on why SF is dying. One, gender trends. Women read more than men, and most women prefer character over ideas. I have female friends who read SF, but many prefer fantasy for the same reasons I do. (I am female.)

Two, *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. I have worked with a college SF group for the last eighteen years, and I've learned that few of these kids read SF anymore. They read comics and *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* novels. At their annual convention, the only people who attend writers' panels are over forty unless the writer does *ST* or *SW* novels.

Three, SF doesn't have the timeless classics fantasy does to pass on to the next generation. There are wonderful SF novels of the past, but most are so outdated scientifically or so difficult that younger readers aren't interested.

Four, we are surrounded by scientific wonders. The sheer amount of new technology makes the possible futures of SF less wonderful. We've become dazzled to the point of blindness by this technology and seek the simpler life of swords and dragons in our fiction.

Five, the failure of the SF market may have more to do with publishers than readers. I write in the romance market where romance sub-genres have been devastated by publishers. I call it the binge and purge cycle. A sub-genre starts selling well so all the publishers print huge amounts of the sub-genre including inferior books. The books stop selling so, the publishers declare the market dead and nothing is published in that genre.

Marilynn Byerly

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

What an interesting question! Several answers come to mind. One is that some of the science fiction I've read in the past couple of years is indeed "too much work" for too little gratification. Some of it is too far removed from the roots of story in myth, the Hero's Journey or other archetypes. But I suspect that a big part of the problem with selling science fiction literature now is that movies (and television) have learned to do these stories better than most books can. Unknown technologies don't describe well on paper, but special effects make them glorious in a movie. Space travel is breathtaking on screen, but ho-hum on paper. Fantasy, on the other hand, does much better in print than on screen. (Magic is easily and delightfully imagined, but in a movie it comes across as mere special-effects fakery.) Furthermore, fantasy is largely devoted to our ancient myths and our deepest longings for heroic deeds, magnificence, wonder, and love.

Beth Taylor

And one more for the road:

To Miss McCarthy:

OK sex sells magazine (i.e. boobs in armor/space suits). If you are going to feature boobs on the cover lets have some racy action under the cover(s). Quite frankly *Realms of Fantasy* has declined in the quality of the stories featured, more like poorly written pulp stuff, and way to much advertising inserts. You talk about J.R.R. Tolkien being the originator of Fantasy (as a example of the shift away from traditional SF). What genre are you trying to appeal to? *Realms of Fantasy* seems to be searching for an identity. Animal stories, occult/murder/mutilation, unicorn? The only identity that is visible is advertising dollars. The only provocative writings were the letters to the editor. Issue Vol4 No.4 was the worst to date, after trying to read each story (I lost interest in each after the first couple paragraphs) the magazine ended up in the recycling bin. It was not worth leaving on the floor of men's room at the bus station, besides I wanted your e-mail address to reply to your survey.

Ray McLaren

Thanks, Mr. McLaren. I hope you get around to replying to the survey one day. To the less-disgruntled readers out there, I've got a ton more where these three came from. If you want to see more, please let me know.

—Shawna McCarthy

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Dear Editor;

I've never written a letter to a magazine before. My son has been reading *Realms of Fantasy* as well as *Science Fiction Age* and I have been looking them over from time to time when I get the chance. I wanted to let you know how much I appreciated your publishing the story "Egyptian Motherlode," by David Sandner and Jacob Weisman. As a musician living in California, this story touched me in a way that stories about trolls and unicorns seldom can. I felt like this was a story about characters I knew. This story was truly special and I wish you and the writers much success. God bless you.

Sincerely,
Jason Whitby
San Francisco, CA

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

You've really outdone yourself with your April edition. "Egyptian Motherlode," by David Sandner and Jacob Weisman was a terrific story. Tense and exciting, it kept me turning pages long after I should have been asleep. I just couldn't put it down. If you can keep these kinds of stories coming, you will have a reader for life. I also enjoyed the exquisite drawings of Alan Lee and William Eakin's "Unicorn Stew."

Arthur Wallberg
San Francisco, CA

Dear Shawna McCarthy:

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you how pleased I am at seeing my first professional sale, "Miss'ippi Snow," appeared in your magazine. I was anxious to see the artist to know how the story struck the artist. In her illustration I think that Janet Aulisio captured both the spirit of the piece as well as the historical period. Thank you for the chance to see my work in such a fine publication.

Best regards,
Debbie Donofrio

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

As a long-time fan of *Realms of Fantasy*, I have had the opportunity to "experience" the lives and the tales of many characters. Each one of your stories is certainly imaginative and unique in the portrayal of conflict. Most often this conflict is there to forward the telling of the story. Without some sort of tension or conflict, there can be no resolution. Without some strain to bring forth a change in a character, there can be no story. This tension need not be caused by a violent, sanguine battle that takes place on the physical plane. Quite often it is the battle that takes place inside the mind of a character that calls

most to our souls.

To create this conflict inside a short story will oftentimes call for a set of opposing forces. These types of dualities have existed for thousands of years in cultures both East and West. To believe that they only occur within the Judeo-Christian belief system as Ms. Haugen does, is giving that belief system too much credit. Within the pre-Christian pantheistic belief systems of the Greeks and Romans there was always conflict. Oftentimes it was dualistic conflict occurring between two gods who favored opposite sides of a mortal conflict. The reason for the conflict was never a simple decision between "good" and "evil."

In such gods as Shiva and Dionysus (the latter a pagan carryover into Greek mythology), we find opposing forces within a single being. To simplify these forces, as well as those opposing forces in the stories of ROF writers, in terms of "good" or "evil" is to ignore the various shades of grey in both life and these stories.

The "balance" and the "harmony" which Ms. Haugen credits to "the people of ancient pagan societies and today's natural tribes," is achieved through the struggle of opposing forces. It is not that "nothing is really either good or bad," it is that nothing is **SOLELY** good or bad. Having read a great many ROF stories over the past few years, I can say that a majority of writers have done an excellent job of portraying the multiple shades of gray which we need in life as well as the duality of opposing forces which we need in a story.

Sincerely,
Dionys Murphy
Portland, Oregon

Dear Shawna;

I felt I had to reply to Andrea Haugen's letter. She writes of the narrow concept of "good" and "evil," which dualistic-thinking Christians came up with—as if Christians had sat around a table and decided on a code of right and wrong. Then she argues that ancient pagan societies did not recognize "good" and "evil" but only the natural balance.

Ms. Haugen should read her mythology more closely. How might she explain the belief of the ancient Greeks that Hades was divided into two—the Elysian Fields for the "good" and another section for "evil." It was also believed that souls reincarnated, and if that soul had belonged to an evil being, they came back as a lower life form.

Among other things, it appears to me that Ms. Haugen is attempting to impose her own beliefs on ancient mythology without true study and comprehension. Pagans did not live without laws. Their value system may

have been different, but they did recognize generosity and greed. I recommend that she look at some of the old folk tales more closely.

John R. Oram
Cambridge, England

Dear Dan Perez;

Hudson Leick is interestingly nasty and all that—but next time how about an article on the actor Bruce Campbell? As "The King of Thieves," appearing in episodes of both *Xena* and *Hercules* he provides a great deal of light-hearted comedy, has a marvelous smile and looks good in green tights. In fact, I am surprised the big screen hasn't snapped him right up. Hopefully we will continue to see him on these two shows and perhaps, Mr. Perez, you could find it in your heart to write us an article about him? Cleavage isn't everything you know...

Jill Jordan
Swansea, MA

Dear Realms;

Thanks to you and to Terri Windling for the marvelous Gallery feature about Alan Lee. His work is magical and haunting in a very ethereal way. When Alan suggested in his interview with Terri that "...to draw a tree, to pay such close attention to every aspect of a tree, is an act of reverence not only toward the tree, and toward the earth itself, but also our human connection to it..." it gives us almost visionary moments of connectedness. These words are quite perceptive, in relation to writing as well as artwork. They can certainly help to explain our connection to fantasy.

Trey McAllister
Brattleboro, VT

On behalf of Realms, I'd like to say thanks to all the readers who responded with letters regarding our April issue. On top of the wonderful response to our survey question, many readers also took the time to comment upon the stories, artwork, and articles in the April magazine. Not that we don't get nice letters all the time—of course we do—but this month the response was exceedingly generous. So generous that the Rumson P.O. that graciously and unfailingly handles our mail is wondering what the heck kind of a contest we're running this month. In any case—thanks from all of us to all of you prolific/compulsive letter-writers—who says letter-writing is a lost art? Thanks to all of you who e-mailed your letters as well, thus giving the P.O. a little respite.

Your comments are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, *Realms of Fantasy*, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, e-mail: s.mccarthy@genie.geis.com

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IN THIS ERA OF CORPORATE TAKE-OVERS—NOT MERELY THEIR GOBBLING OF ONE another, but their increasingly casual ability to trump national laws and boundary rules—much attention has been directed at the brutally effective power of simple hugeness. Massive mergers have given banks astounding control over small and large depositors; chain stores have managed to turn even New York City's once gloriously highfaluting Fifth Avenue into just another chain store strip-mall and politics is nakedly controlled by whoever holds the fattest wallet.

On the other hand I find this era is also noteworthy for a vastly varied upsurge of what has somewhat oversnappily been labeled "power people." Decades back the world was astounded to see not only countries but entire empires rapidly destroyed by the bestirred abused and underprivileged who moved against their erstwhile masters not so much as an army but as a virus attack.

The lesson continues to be taught as this or that unsatisfactory regime established by the first arousal of the supposedly ruled have, in their turn, been almost casually ground to powder by those same supposedly ruled once again aroused.

The same phenomenon is operating more quietly (and possibly with what may turn out to be with more profound and lasting effect) *within* these societies as they rise and tumble only to be replaced by other societies that rise and tumble. One form of it that has proven to be astoundingly effective is the simple notion of the support group: One of us has a problem and the surrounding society's machinery is unable to help because it does not understand the problem and therefore makes all the wrong moves if it tries to deal with the problem. The solution is for the sufferer to find others plagued by the same problem for they decidedly *will* understand not only the problem but the sufferer's suffering, and accumulated experience has shown that their combined efforts more often than not give them a very good chance to help each other to get the damned thing under control.

This notion was blundered into by a pathetic drunk named Bill Wilson who, after a multitude of heroic and heartbreaking failures to beat his illness, made a desperate pact with Dr. Bob, another drunk, to help him stop boozing if he'd return the favor. When to their dawning amazement they saw the thing seemed to be working, they went to a hospital ward to visit a third drunk brought near death by alcohol, and when they saw their combined efforts resulted in his successful healing the rickety wonder that is Alcoholics Anonymous was born and has become so thumpingly successful that the medical fraternity almost automatically recommends it to any patient suffering from the disease.

Being a resounding success, AA is now a legitimate target for humor and William Browning Spencer has risen to the challenge splendidly with *Irrational Fears* (White Wolf Publishing, 290 pages, hardcover, \$19.99), a fine farcical fantasy continuing the absurd expansion of the Lovecraftian (now moving into Clark Ashton Smithian) universe which he has explored before, most particularly and directly in *Resume with Monsters*.

The novel begins with Jack Lowry, a teacher of American Literature, finding himself back for the third time at the Seventh Street Hurley Memorial Detox due to yet another flamboyant interruption of his so far feckless attempts at recovery.

Staggering into the hospital's grim hallway he comes across a gurney containing the sleeping form of the lovely Kerry Beckett with her arm in a cast and this first,

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enchanted view followed by a meeting at breakfast where she looks up to reveal blue eyes that "would have made Shakespeare nervous because there was the stuff of bad poetry..."

I'm in love, Jack thought. He thought it the way one might think, after an accident with a chain saw, "I've just lopped off my thumb," the thought as yet unaccompanied by pain.

During that breakfast he also encounters two other members assigned to his group, an older man, with a "faintly parasitic" looking white mustache, named Ed Tilman who is "perhaps a banker" yet has a stronger flavor of possible paranoia about him, and a teen named Al, whose head is shaved and who wears a ring in one eyebrow and who Jack hopes Kerry will not find attractive.

The remaining group members are a sad fat woman named Eunice who believes it is her children's fault she's in the hospital: "Thrown out," she growled. "Like a dog that's gone blind or a burned up pot roast. All I got left is the sweet love of Jesus.";



Gates, a furious little black man who is not happy about the turns AA has taken, particularly its increasing inclusion of the young: "Young people got no bidness in A and A. They sposed to be getting down. A and A's for us old, whupped mothers."; and Hinkle, a truck driver who is clearly unenthusiastic about the notion of continuing his enforced sobriety. The group's counselor is Wesley Parks who Jack knows from his last visit is extremely defensive about not being a recovering alcoholic and whom he strongly suspects may even actually dislike them.

The plot thickens and an ominous menace comes in view when the group emerges from an AA meeting the Hurley detox van has driven them to and encounters a group of neat young people wearing white dress shirts with black ties and pants holding each other's hands in "an absent-minded, listless fashion that appeared to be an habitual clinging rather than some show of solidarity," as they look on with obvious disapproval at one

of their members receiving a pummeling from a burley recovering alcoholic.

Jack picks up one of the scattered yellow flyers of the Clear. Under the heading YOU ARE IN HELL and a photo of Dorian Greenway, the founder and leader of the Clear, the flyer explains AA is on the wrong track: Alcoholics are not victims of an illness but members of the ancient Tribe of K'n-Yan who worshipped the God

Tsathoggua, were hurled into an asynchronous reality (which accounts for their perverse focus on alcohol), made subject to attacks by demons (misunderstood by modern science as being a product of *delirium tremens*) and must ready themselves for the coming Unraveling when they will at last be freed from their addiction. Jack's understandable initial skepticism to these grotesque claims is shaken when he affrightedly observes a toilet bowl demon sensationally destroy one of his fellow recovering alcoholics a few nights later.

The plot gets even thicker when counselor Parks informs the group that both he and they are going to transfer to a new facility, New Way, located on 20 acres of deep woods in the small town of Harken. Their arrival is not promising as their van is no sooner parked when they are immediately attacked by two large, deeply disturbed dogs, one named Bill Wilson and the other, Dr. Bob. These violent creatures are deterred from killing poor, fat Eunice only after New Way's director—a man with shoulder-length gray hair, a gray mustache, and "the face of some civil war general, crazy with years of deprivation and the denial of defeat"—shotguns Bill Wilson to death and sends Dr. Bob away with a series of near misses.

I would go on in this detailed fashion but think it might be best at this point to merely assure you that, being a work of William Browning Spencer, you can rest assured that *Irrational Fears* has only begun to thicken. Probably best I step aside and let it do so on its own.

I feel it is, however, my moral duty to warn you before you attend the meetings at The Happy Roads AA Club in Harken that the wall mottoes read ONE DAY AT A ZIGMUTH and and EASY N'GAMF and the plaque over the door exclaims BUT



FOR THE GRACE OF AZATHOTH. It would also be entirely thoughtless of me not to inform you to take proper precautions before reading the excerpts from *Alcoholism and the Pnakotic Pentagram*. And I wouldn't have anything more to do with Gummy Bears, if I were you, until I'd read this book.

Harry Turtledove is billed on the blurb of this latest book of his as "The Master of Alternative Fiction" and, for once, the publisher's brag is absolutely true. He has

piled up an amazing stack of fantasies based on the notion of "What if?" and they are not only consistently entertaining but marvelously educational. I know I've painlessly absorbed great heaps of information from these books without the slightest effort and have many times paused in something like shock as, thanks to one sly maneuver or another by this gifted fellow, I've suddenly and painlessly got hold of a historical insight which a lesser teacher would probably had to have pounded into my cranium with a mallet.

Although it is not billed as a continuation of a series, *The Great War: The American Front* (Del Rey, 512 pages, hardcover, \$25.00) is based on the world Turtledove set up in his last book, *So Few Remain*. In this touching and highly effective novel not only did the Civil War end with our national house divided, that division was grimly exacerbated by a second contest between the United and the Confederate States of America. It also created a colorful web of international alliances and the book ended with the once more frustrated United States and the emerging Germans carefully feeling their way toward détente.

The Great War starts in 1914, the French and English and German powers are playing more or less the same game they played in our "real" world (the quotation marks are

a tribute to Mr. Turtledove's efficient mind bending) but all is marvelously altered because there is no one United States as we know it which can ally itself with France and England against Germany. It is a totally different balance of power.

Both parts of divided north America have had considerably different histories, thanks to the fortunes of war. Manumission has finally come to the Confederate States of America so that slavery is over, but



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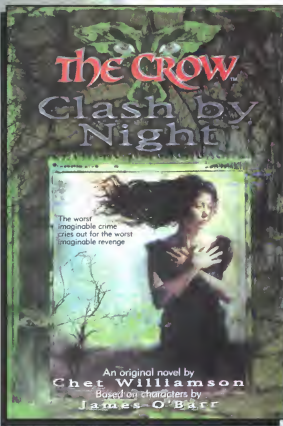
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while the laws forbidding teaching negroes to read have been repealed (Turtledove avoids terms such as "blacks" or "African-Americans" since they do not exist in this world) there are no negro schools because Southern whites almost universally assume any serious efforts to educate the members of what they take to be biologically inferior creatures would be a waste of time and money and probably morally reprehensible.

The Socialist movement in the United States of America has quite a different flavor than it did at the same period in "our" world because former President Lincoln became very much associated with it when he toured the country after losing the Civil War and tirelessly expounded its philosophy to all who would listen. His writings on the topic are up there in the canon right alongside Marx and Engels.

Of course this is the most superficial survey of the complex but cohesive, multilayered world Turtledove has created. For instance, the first exhibit of modern art, cubists and all, is not held in the North as it was in "our" world but in the great house of a South Carolina plantation near Charleston with none other than Marcel Duchamp as resident artist, and not a very nice Marcel Duchamp at that and—to pluck two other startling but entirely logical alterations in this world of If—the President of the United States of America is Teddy Roosevelt and the President of the Confederate States of America is Woodrow Wilson. This last struck me as

a particularly nice touch and I am very curious to see what becomes of Woodrow during the turmoil of this other World War I.

As is his usual technique, Turtledove shows us this world through the eyes of a wide variety of characters so that we can see it from as many varied points of view as possible: a woman running a coffee house in Washington, DC who has become involved in serious spying against the occupying Confederates; a United States airplane pilot involved in the invasion of Canada, moving from plane to plane as the deadly technology of bombing and strafing advances; a southern steel worker learning how to work with negroes and the disturbing fact his wife now has a job working in the same foundry; a French Canadian farmer who has increasingly good reasons for disliking American officers and their countless requisitions; a United States sailor involved in the taking of Pearl Harbor from the British and none other than Gen. George Armstrong Custer, grown old and fat and meaner than ever and desperately trying to advance his faltering career by heaving thousands of soldiers willy nilly at the enemy—and all these are only a few, the tiniest sample.

Dive into *The Great War* by all means. It will make a good deal about that fearsomely important conflict clear to you—the "real" one, that is—and bring into focus a heck of a lot of what is "really" happening now.

Considering the great fuss constantly being made about J.R.R. Tolkien in blurs on

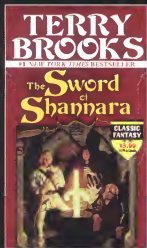
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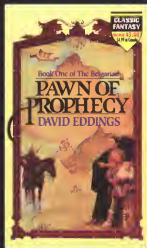
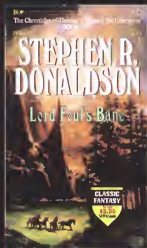


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the covers of innumerable fantasy novels (in vain boasts along the lines of "... this book is as good if not better than the works of J.R.R. Tolkien...") it seems to me very little has been said about *Roverandom* (Houghton Mifflin, 106 pages, hardcover; \$17.00), a whole new book of his that has recently been brought out in a very handsome edition by Houghton Mifflin.

Roverandom is introduced, edited, and annotated by Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond and contains four illustrations by J.R.R. himself in his own inimitable style, although I seriously suspect (as, I believe, do Scull and Hammond) that one of these—a really loveable landscape with figures, dog, geese, and pigs—has nothing to do with the book but was dug out of some hidden cranny and snuck in along with the others to enhance the general effect. Altogether okay with me since it rescues this dear view of wonderland from oblivion and allows us to walk along beside and perhaps chat with the pig herder or the goose woman or maybe wander along the coast glimpsed afar all by ourselves.

The book is touchingly based on a Tolkien family episode that took place when they were on a seaside vacation back in the 20's. Young Michael had a little metal dog which he loved mightily and it got lost somewhere, sometime, somehow on a ramble along the beach and although everyone turned out and diligently scoured all the paths they'd taken the little toy dog was never found. Fortu-

nately for Michael his father was J.R.R. Tolkien who could, and did, make his unhappy child feel better by creating the basic story of a dog that was turned into a toy by a wizard and that had many exciting and rewarding adventures directly after his favorite boy happened to lose him during a walk on a beach.

Tolkien noted down the tale, expanded and fooled with it through the years and, after *The Hobbit* had been published, offered it to his editors in typed manuscript form as a possible next book.

Who knows? It might have eventually been bought, but the resoundingly huge success of the first book sunk it by convincing the publishers that the wisest course would be to drop all other projects and forthwith pursue hobbits and their Middle-Earth to the exclusion of every other project. Thus the little tale of *Roverandom* did not see print until 1998.

In their very interesting and informative Introduction the editors offer various classic fairy stories and renowned authors which may have inspired this book, but they fail to mention the one art form that seems to overpoweringly be the major model for this work, namely the Christmas Pantomime.

The Pantomime is entirely unknown here in America but it has been an annual staple for the children of Great Britain since the early 18th century. Pantomos are wildly imaginative, fantastic theatrical productions which freewheelingly combine ballet, music,

bizarre, bespangled costumes and flamboyant scenery depicting fantastic places, all of it rather loosely tied together by a plot full of vaudeville humor featuring puns either spoken or delivered in the form of marvelously magical special effects.

Roverandom lacks a musical score but it seems to me it's got all the rest. The wizards—there are no less than three of them—are theatrical in the extreme and their combined magic send the toy dog into wondrous locales full of dancing mermaids or musical gardens or choirs of children or flocks of sheep equipped with golden bells to warn the Man in the Moon of approaching dragons.

By far the most impressive illustration in the book is the Undersea Garden (Ladies and Gentlemen) surrounding the fabulous, rather Brighton-Beachy Castle of the Mer-King, complete with elaborate seaweed shell decor and a large, smiling whale in the upper-left hand corner. If that wasn't inspired by a Panto backdrop I'll eat it whole.

That aside, there is the usual fun of spotting the buds and embryos which will sprout and grow into the beloved wonders of Tolkien's worlds to come. The Introduction mentions some good ones, the best being the geographical resemblances between astral regions shown in *Roverandom* and the geography of the West of the world in the *Silmarillion*. An odd one I spotted is the vaguely unnerving resemblance of the Tower of the

Continued on page 38

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Master filmmaker Ray Harryhausen animated fantasy's classic movies.

WHEN THE ORIGINAL *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG* WAS RELEASED IN 1949 IT MARKED the return to the screen of one of cinema's pioneers. Willis O'Brien, whose stop-motion animation skills and special effects wizardry created movie magic in the original *Lost World* (1925) and *King Kong* (1933), suffered several setbacks in the intervening years. Now after a long absence, he finally had the chance to once more demonstrate his artistry. Assisting O'Brien in this endeavor, in his feature film debut, was an animator destined to carry forth stop-motion animation for the following 30 years—Ray Harryhausen.

The two had met years earlier when a young Harryhausen visited O'Brien while he was preparing *War Eagles*, which like so many of O'Brien's projects never reached the screen. "I called him up at MGM and he kindly invited me over to show me all his preparation sketches for his film. I took over one of my model dinosaurs to show him and he said the legs looked like sausages! He suggested I should study anatomy, so I took courses in drawing and sculpture. I kept in touch with him throughout the war, during which he started a film called *Gwangi*. That collapsed unfortunately, but then he got together with Merian Cooper and started work on *Mighty Joe Young*."

For Harryhausen, working on the film was a dream come true. Years earlier, at the age of 13, his life was changed forever when he saw *King Kong*, and now he had the opportunity to work with that star's creator.

"After I saw *Kong*, I couldn't get it out of my mind. I got intrigued with the fact that you could make these models move and make them look so gigantic. I haven't been the same since. So it was one of the great pleasures of my life to work with Willis O'Brien."

Initially engaged as an apprentice, Harryhausen ultimately performed the bulk of the movie's animation, as O'Brien's time was occupied devising how the film's special effects would work. Utilizing the same techniques employed in *King Kong*, O'Brien's method of combining actors with stop-motion puppets was to create elaborate miniature sets into which he would place the live-action footage. "Most of the scenery of *Mighty Joe Young* in the jungle was painted by four artists on 10' x 8' pieces of plate glass, and that was very costly." Free to concentrate solely on the animation for one of the few times in his career, Harryhausen believes *Mighty Joe Young* contains some of his best work. "I think particularly the opening shot of Joe beating the lion cage is some-

of my work that I'm proud of, as well as... when he's in the basement drunk. I had a lot of freedom. I had worked with Obie [O'Brien] for so long on the preparation of the movie that I knew just what he liked and expected, so I tried to give him that."

The movie's special effects were widely recognized as being superior to those in *King Kong*, and earned O'Brien his only Academy Award. Despite this, *Mighty Joe Young* could not match *Kong*'s magic at the box office, and started a decline in O'Brien's career from which he did not recover. "Obie didn't get a picture for a long time. He prepared several but nobody was beating at his door even after he won the Academy Award. It was a shame because he had some great ideas but nobody was interested in putting up the money. The rumor got around that *Mighty Joe Young*

Stop-motion animator Ray Harryhausen's gryphon defends itself in *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, the surprise hit of 1974.



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ABOVE: Animating the 12 snakes on Medusa's head required considerable time and concentration for *Clash of the Titans*. LEFT: At 13 frames per day, it took almost five months to animate this scene from Jason and the Argonauts.



cost over two million dollars and everybody was afraid that the budget of his pictures would go way over. I guess they just didn't appreciate the quality and the showmanship in *Mighty Joe*."

Learning from his mentor's misfortune, Harryhausen devised a more cost-effective method of combining stop-motion animation with live-action for his first solo feature *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (1953). "Dynamation," as Harryhausen would come to call his technique, was quite simply the reverse of O'Brien's method. Instead of placing the live footage in elaborate sets, Harryhausen placed his creatures in the live footage. Made for the ridiculously low sum of \$200,000, the film went on to make over five million dollars and started the 1950's sci-fi movie cycle of giant monsters unleashed by atom bombs. One of these was Harryhausen's own *It Came From Beneath the Sea*

(1955). Starring a giant octopus that attacks San Francisco, budget constraints dictated that the monster would only have six tentacles. "It was a sextopus, but nobody knew because most of them were under the water. You only saw two or three at a time."

The movie started his long association with producer Charles Schneer, one that ensured Harryhausen would not suffer the same fate as Willis O'Brien. "It was a good opportunity. We were able to make the pictures inexpensive enough that we had a longevity." Having started one SF trend Harryhausen joined another, depicting visitors from outer space in his next two films. *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* (1956) confined his stop-motion skills to the flight of the saucers and the destruction of Washington, as budget limitations forced the aliens to be portrayed by men in metallic suits. Fortunately this was not the case in *20 Million Miles to Earth* (1957). Featuring his most popular creature, the

movie is the closest Harryhausen would come to emulating *King Kong*. Unlike his previous monsters, audience sympathy lay with the Ymir as it battled for survival throughout the streets of Rome. "It is very hard, unless it's a humanoid creature, to get sympathy in an audience. I think we achieved it in *20 Million Miles and Mighty Joe*."

The 7th Voyage of Sinbad (1958) marked a change in Harryhausen's career. Instead of his film revolving around one stop-motion creation, here the hero took on several, including a couple of Cyclops, two Rocs, a dragon, and most notably a skeleton. "I wanted to get away from destroying cities with bad monsters. I had always wanted to animate a skeleton so I ransacked the Arabian Nights and came across the Sinbad stories. I developed eight big drawings and took them all over Hollywood but nobody was interested. So later on when I worked with Mr. Schneer I brought them out and we finally made the film." The film was also his first to combine live action and stop-motion in color. "That took a lot longer. You had to color-balance a scene, which required a lot more time for making tests than if you did it in black and white. Also if you left a scene overnight and the temperature changed you would see a flash where you stopped, because for some reason the temperature would change the color. After a while they developed a film that wouldn't do that, but it was rather disconcerting at the time."

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A dragon and a cyclops prepare to battle in *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*.

Having essayed mythology Harryhausen turned to some other literary classics. *The Three Worlds of Gulliver* (1960) necessitated a move to England, where he still resides, to take advantage of the superior traveling matte process. Dominated by the effect of giants and little people, the only stop-motion creations were a brief appearance by a squirrel, and a battle between Gulliver and a crocodile. *Mysterious Island* (1961), based on a Jules Verne novel, featured more of what the viewing public expected from a Harry-

hausen picture, as castaways battled giant creatures bred by Captain Nemo. The movie also highlights his method of depicting a creature's pace, juxtaposing the rapid movement of a bee's wings with the slow movements of an octopus's tentacles. "You just sense those things when you're animating. Big moves for fast motion, little moves for slow motion. Animating the tentacles was very difficult and critical because you had to move them less than a millimeter a frame to keep that slow-moving look, which can

become very tedious at times."

Harryhausen's next picture remains his favorite. Not only does he class *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) as his most complete picture, but it also contains two of his favourite sequences. "I enjoyed working on the skeleton sequence and the hydra sequence because they were quite a challenge. We rehearsed the skeleton sequence with seven stuntmen portraying the skeletons. After the actors were familiar with the movements we photographed them shadow boxing without the stuntmen. That was the piece of film I would put the skeletons in and time it to the movement of the actor. It was a very slow process when you had all seven skeletons with the three men." It was at these times that Harryhausen averaged approximately 13 frames of film a day which, when one considers it takes 24 frames to make one second of film, accounts for the scene taking about four-and-a-half months to animate. It also explains why Harryhausen chose to use children in suits to portray all but a few of the Selenites in *First Men in the Moon* (1964). "One has to be practical, although I hated to do it. With computer animation you can use the same ones over and over, but in my day I would still be at it if I animated hundreds of Selenites."

For the first time in a decade, Harryhausen's next film would not be a Charles H. Schneer production. While a fur-clad Raquel Welch certainly helped at the box office, *One*

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Million Years B.C.'s (1966) other assets included an allosaur, a triceratops, a brief appearance by a brontosaurus, and a pair of duelling pterodactyls. "It took a lot of time to do that particular scene because you were suspending them on wires, which you then had to paint out by hand so you wouldn't see them." Spurred on by the movie's success, Harryhausen and Schneer dusted off an old Willis O'Brien project and produced *Valley of Gwangi* (1969). Featuring similar creatures, the film's unique creation was a tiny horse, or eohippus, a creature Harryhausen admits feeling some reluctance toward. "People are more critical when you try to animate an animal which is known. A horse's movements are quite well known to everybody, but who knows what a dinosaur moves like." Unlike its predecessor, *Gwangi* failed at the box office. "Warner Brothers didn't give it very much publicity. Everybody thought it was a Japanese film, like *Godzilla*, because of the strange name." Coming after the box-office failures of *Jason* and the *Argonauts*, and *First Men in the Moon*, Schneer desperately needed a success. Joining forces once again with Columbia, who distributed the majority of their films, the team returned to the source of their greatest triumph, *Sinbad*.

The Golden Voyage of Sinbad was the surprise hit of 1974. Included in its lineup of mythological creatures were two examples of what could almost be classed as a Harryhausen trademark. "I don't know where that came from. I think in my youth I saw a

film where a statue came to life, which obviously left a profound impression." Like the Talos from *Jason*, Harryhausen's animation of the ship's masthead and statue of Kali required their movements to be purposely stiff, to convey the solidity of their origins. "Over the years people have tried to make stop-motion smooth. They had go-motion and all that sort of thing, but I don't see the point of that. You know these things aren't real in the first place, and for fantasy films if you make it too real it gives a mundane impression. I think stop-motion is ideal for fantasy films." The film's success prompted Columbia to finance *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977), which also featured a statue brought to life. Unlike his previous creations, though, the Minotaur could easily have been achieved without the aid of stop-motion animation, an attribute that could also be ascribed to many of the film's other creatures. Despite being dominated by such familiar animals as a baboon, a walrus, and a bee, the film went on to become his most successful for Columbia.

Due to its large budget, Columbia passed on what would turn out to be Harryhausen's final film. With MGM's backing, *Clash of the Titans* (1981) was his most lavish production, featuring a big name cast and a welcome return to more mythological creatures, not all of which he animated. For the only time in his career, Harryhausen sought assistance from other stop-motion animators, namely Jim Danforth and Steven Archer. "We had

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1953—*The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*. Atomic testing revives a gigantic "rhedosaurus" frozen for millions of years, and soon the creature is destroying the streets of New York.

1954—*It Came From Beneath the Sea*. Atomic testing in the Pacific awakens an undersea behemoth that threatens San Francisco.

1956—*Earth vs. The Flying Saucers*. A sci-fi adventure of aliens attacking Washington, D.C.

1957—*20 Million Miles To Earth*. A spacecraft from the first Earth-Venus mission crashes near Italy, and a canister containing a Venusian lifeform is recovered by a boy.

1958—*The 7th Voyage Of Sinbad*. Sinbad battles an evil wizard who sends him on a dangerous quest.

1960—*The Three Worlds Of Gulliver*. Gulliver finds himself a giant in Lilliput, mouse-sized in Brobdingnag, and in trouble wherever he goes.

1961—*Mysterious Island*. Escaped Civil War prisoners find themselves on an island populated by giant crabs, bees, and prehistoric birds.

1963—*Jason And The Argonauts*. The quest for the Golden Fleece by Jason and his band of warriors.

1964—*First Men In The Moon*. An eccentric professor in Victorian England develops an anti-gravity invention and uses it to travel to the moon.

1967—*One Million Years B.C.* The Shell Peo-

ple must learn to live with their neighbors, the Rock Tribe, before they all become dinosaur fodder.

1969—*The Valley Of Gwangi*. A circus promoter in 1912 Mexico finds a hidden valley where prehistoric creatures still live, and he sets out to rope an allosaurus to exhibit.

1974—*The Golden Voyage Of Sinbad*. Sinbad embarks on a danger-filled quest populated by living statues, gryphons, centaurs, and other menaces.

1977—*Sinbad And The Eye Of The Tiger*. Creatures of the deep provide obstacles as Sinbad attempts to break a sinister spell.

1981—*Clash Of The Titans*. The spectacular adventure epic based on the Greek myth of the heroic Perseus.

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technical problems with the sprocket holes. They weren't accurate, so when you did a double exposure scene the two pieces of film would move. It took us over a month to solve the problem, causing us to get behind schedule. So I had to get some other people in to try and catch up." The two animators contributed to several of the film's creatures, particularly Pegasus and Bubo, but one creature that was Harryhausen's alone was his all-time favorite. "I always wanted to create a Medusa, and here I had a chance to make something entirely different from the classical concepts. The difficulty in animating her was keeping track of all the snakes. She had 12 snakes in her hair and for every frame of film each snake had to be moved. The heads and the tails had to be kept track of, either going forwards or backwards, and that became quite a time-consuming problem. That's why I prefer to work alone, because if people ask you a question it breaks your concentration, and stop-motion animation is based on concentration."

The film made record profits for MGM, but was heavily criticized in some quarters. "The critics started jumping on the bandwagon of *Star Wars* so they got exceptionally critical about our film. I don't know why. I think it stands up with any of the other films but that's the fashion of the critics. They wanted to jump on the bandwagon of the future so they start picking holes in anything done in the past." After spending more than three years on the film, Harryhausen took a long vacation to contemplate his future. His films had always given him a sense of personal accomplishment. Crafted from his ideas, he would translate these to drawings, from which the design of his creatures would be based. Next, he would solve how the film's special effects would be achieved, and assist in the direction of the live action to ensure he had the right material to work with. Finally came the rewarding yet exhausting process of stop-motion animation. Now, as *Clash of the Titans* proved, rising costs called into question the viability of his working alone.

"It makes things much less comfortable to work with when you have an enormous budget hanging over your head. I grew tired of the deadlines and the frantic costs that build up." So although he did some pre-production work on several projects, including *Sinbad Goes to Mars*, *Sinbad and the Seven Wonders of the World*, *People of the Mist*, and *Force of the Trojans*, nothing resulted and he officially announced his retirement in 1987.

Harryhausen has kept himself busy over the years by creating bronze figures of some of his creatures, attending festivals and tributes, and making himself available to fans the world over. He has also made the odd cameo appearance, such in as *Spies Like Us* (1985) and *Beverly Hills Cop III* (1994). So while you watch the remake of a landmark in stop-motion animation, keep an eye out for the man who first breathed life into *Mighty Joe Young*. **JB**

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BETWEEN THE SETTING OF THE SUN AND THE BLACK OF NIGHT, DUSK IS A POTENT, magical time... for in its eerie half-light (according to folklore found around the globe) one can cross the borders dividing our mundane world from supernatural realms. Like many children, I longed to discover a doorway into Faerieland or a wardrobe leading to Narnia. I recall a summer night's solitary vigil in an old graveyard: a small girl huddled in the shadows, escaping the chaos of a troubled home, trying to conjure a portal to a magic realm by sheer force of will. Like many children hungry for a deeper connection with the spirit-filled unknown, what I failed to find that moonlit night I discovered in the pages of fantasy books, and later through studies and travels in enchanted landscapes of legend and myth.

When my child-self sat among the graves, I was in the right place at the wrong time. Autumn, not summer, is the season in most folk tales when doors between worlds open. In Celtic lore, October 31st is Samhain (All Hallow's Eve, or Hallowe'en): the night when Arawn, Lord of the Dead, rides the hills with his ghostly white hounds, and the Faery Court rides forth in stately procession across the land. In ancient times, hearth fires were smothered while bonfires blazed upon the hills, surrounded by circular trenches to protect all mortals from the faery host and the wandering spirits of the dead. In later centuries, Hallowe'en turned into a night of revels for witches and ghouls, eventually tamed into the modern holiday of costumes, tricks, and treats.

Although the prospect of traffic between the living and the dead has often been feared, some cultures celebrate those special times when doors to the Underworld stood open. In Egypt, Osiris (god of the Netherworld, death, and resurrection) was drowned in the Nile by his brother Seth on the 17th of Athyr (November); each year on this night dead spirits were permitted to return to their homes, guided by the lamps of living relatives and honored by feasts. In Mexico, a similar tradition was born from a mix of indigenous folk beliefs and medieval Spanish Catholicism, resulting in *los Días de Muertos* (the Days of the Dead)—a holiday still widely observed across Mexico today.

Celebrations vary from region to region but generally take place over several days (or weeks). In some areas, October 27 is the day to put out food and water for the unmoored dead—the spirits of those with no survivors and no homes to return to. On the 28th, food is offered to those who died by accidental or violent means; these gifts are also placed outside the home, to guard against malign spirits. Within the house, an *ofrenda* or offering is painstakingly assembled on a lavishly decorated altar. Food, drink, clothes, tequila, cigarettes, chocolates, and children's toys are set out for departed loved ones, surrounded by candles, flowers, palm leaves, tissue paper banners, and the smoke of copal incense. Golden paths of marigold petals are strewn from the altar to the street (sometimes all the way to the cemetery) to help the confused souls of the dead find their way back home. The souls of unbaptized children ("infants in limbo") return

Brian Froud says of his painting, "Twilight is the Faery time, as Hallowe'en is the twilight of the year when all spirits abound. This picture is the moment of stepping between this world and the Faery world..."



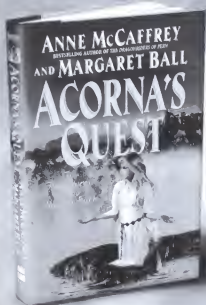
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on October 30; on the 31st all other children return and are fed with the sweets and drinks that were known to be favorites of theirs in life. Adult souls return on November 1, and theirs is a more elaborate feast, including gifts of new clothes and blankets or baskets to carry offerings away.

According to Fredy Mendez, a young Totonac man from Veracruz, "Between 31 October and 2 November, past generations were careful always to leave the front door open, so that the souls of the deceased could enter. My grandmother was constantly worried, and forever checking that the door had not been shut. Younger people are less concerned, but there is one rule we must obey: While the festival lasts, we treat all living beings with kindness. This includes dogs, cats, even flies or mosquitoes. If you should see a fly on the rim of a cup, don't frighten it away—it is a dead relative who has returned. The dead come to eat tamales and to drink hot chocolate. What they take is vapor, or steam, from the food. They don't digest it physically: They extract the goodness from what we provide. This is an ancient belief. Each year we receive our relatives with joy. We sit near the altar to keep them company, just as we would if they were alive. At midday on 2 November the dead depart. Those who have been well received go laden with bananas, tamales, mole, and good things. Those who have been poorly received go empty handed and grieving to the grave. Some people here have even seen them, and heard their lamentations."

This past October I traveled the short distance from my winter home in southern Arizona to the vivid country south of the Border, along with a friend researching a novel set during los *Días de Muertos*. In one vast stretch of urban cemetery, perched precariously on dry desert hills, a raucous festival atmosphere reigned among booths selling foods and flowers choking the streets outside the cemetery gates. Inside, people of all ages cleaned, repaired, and repainted family graves, decorating them with flowers and candles while musicians strolled among the bright crowds playing lively mariachi tunes. In most regions, the traditional celebration involves an all-night grave-side vigil. (Some believe it is dangerous to enter cemeteries at other times of year.) The vigil is often a party where lavish picnics are spread across the graves—feasts of tamales, mole, sugar candies shaped as skeletons and skulls, and *pan de muerto* (bread of dead), all lovingly shared with deceased friends, relatives, and ancestral spirits. In other areas of Mexico the festival is a carnival-like parade, complete with revellers masked in skulls and other horrific costumed figures, dancing through the music-filled streets, making mockery of death.

We left the urban cemetery to journey into the countryside, following narrow mountain roads until we reached a tiny village ceme-



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tery with a hushed and solemn atmosphere. Candles flickered on freshly painted graves strewn with red gladioli, white carnations, tall plumes of magenta cockscomb, and golden blankets of marigold petals. On November 1, a long, candle-lit procession passes from village to church, and families here keep watch throughout the night, visiting with departed loved ones. Sitting among pinpoints of candle light reflecting the stars overhead, it felt indeed like a borderland between the worlds of the living and the dead... and here I was, I realized then, years and miles from my childhood, still keeping vigil among the graves, still searching for mythic worlds.

In Greek mythology, Persephone regularly crosses the border between the living and the dead, dwelling half the year with her mother (the goddess Demeter) in the upper world—and half the year with her husband (Hades) in the realm of the dead below. In the story of Orpheus, he follows his dead wife deep into Hades' realm, where he bargains for her life in return for a demonstration of his musical skills. Hades agrees to release the lovely Eurydice back to Orpheus, provided he leads his wife from the Underworld without looking back. During the journey, he cannot hear his wife's footsteps and so he breaks the taboo. Eurydice vanishes and the path to Hades' realm is closed. A similar tale is told of Izanagi in Japanese lore, who attempts to reclaim his beloved Izanami from the Land of Shadows. He may take her back if he promises not to try to see Izanami's face—but he breaks the taboo, and is horrified to discover a rotting corpse. When we look at earlier Sumerian myth, we find the goddess Inana is more successful in bringing her lover, Dumuzi, back from the Underworld; in Babylonian myth, this role falls to Ishtar, rescuing her lover Tammuz: "If thou opens not the gate," she says to the seven gatekeepers of the world below, "I will smash the door, I will shatter the bolt, I will smash the doorknob, I will move the doors, I will raise up the dead, eating the living, so that the dead will outnumber the living." During the three days of Ishtar's descent, all sexual activity stops on Earth. The third day of the drama is the Day of Joy, the time of ascent, resurrection, and procreation, when the year begins anew.

This cycle of death and resurrection, of course, is echoed in many mythic traditions, from the Solstice ceremonies of druidic Celts to the Easter pageants of Christian sects. In the border region of southern Arizona, where Mexican American, Native American and Euroamerican cultures all come together, we find a fascinating mixture of Christian and indigenous myths in the gorgeous Easter ceremonies of the Yaqui (Yöme) Indian tribe. Various secretive rituals practiced in the months between Christmas and Easter, most intensively during the weeks of Lent, culminate in a public drama

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enacting an unusual version of Christ's Passion, blending ancient Yaqui mystical beliefs with 17th-century Spanish Catholicism. The "three Marys" (figures of the Blessed Virgin) are guarded in an open-sided church by hymn-singing women, *matachines* (a dance society of men and boys), *puscola* dancers (a kind of holy clown), and the deer dancer—an enchanted figure from the old Yaqui "religion of the woods." Opposing them are the forces of Judas: faceless *fariseos*, dressed in black, and *chupayekas* wearing elaborate masks, strings of rattles, and painted wooden swords. These dark figures march and dance around the church for many days and nights... and eventually, on the last day before Easter, they attack. The church bells ring, the deer dancer leaps, the faithful pelt the dark forces with flowers. The watching crowds throw flowers and confetti, shouting "Gloria! Gloria! Gloria!" The dark ones fall back, regroup, march... and then attack once more. Again they're driven back. On the third attack they are overcome by the forces of good: by songs, prayers, armloads of flowers. They strip off weapons, black scarves, and masks (subsequently burned on a huge bonfire), and relatives drag the exhausted men back into the safety of the church—a ritual resurrection, dedicating new lives to the forces of good.

The deer and *puscola* dancers have been incorporated into this ritual, yet come from the tribe's pre-Christian past. They are, in one sense, shamanic figures, able to cross the borders between the human world of the Baptised Ones (the modern Yaqui) to the flower world of the ancestors (a magical people called the *Surem*). Throughout the nights of the Easter ceremonies the deer and *puscola* songs are sung, and an eerie music is played on rasps, rattles, gourds, flutes, and drums. Most years I attend the ceremony in one of several Yaqui pueblos nearby; staying through the night as the crowds drift off, keeping vigil until the dawn. This year an unusually chilly night was warmed by fragrant fires of mesquite, while a young deer dancer pawed at the ground in ritual, highly stylized motions, poised on the thinnest of borders between human and animal consciousness.

In the hours before dawn I saw a sight I'd never witnessed in previous years: coyote dances, an art newly revived in pueblos north of the border (brought back from older villages on the River Yaqui in Mexico). Stylized movements and high-pitched howls conjured visions of the tricky creature who gives the coyote dance its name, sending cold chills running down my spine as magic was evoked by moonlight.

In many myths, Coyote (and other Tricksters such as Raven, Hermes, and Uncle Tompa) has a special, uncanny ability to cross boundaries and open doors. "They are lords of in-between," says scholar Lewis Hyde. "[Trickster] is the spirit of the doorway leading out, and the crossroads at the



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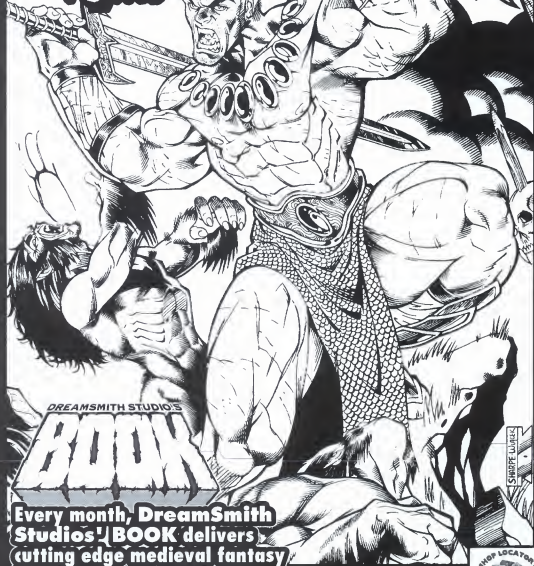
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The National Library of Poetry to award 250 total prizes to amateur poets in coming months

Owings Mills, Maryland – The National Library of Poetry has just announced that \$48,000.00 in prizes will be awarded over the next 12 months in the brand new North American Open Amateur Poetry Contest. The contest is open to everyone and entry is free.

"We're especially looking for poems from new or unpublished poets," indicated Howard Ely, spokesperson for The National Library of Poetry. "We have a ten year history of awarding large prizes to talented poets who have never before won any type of writing competition."

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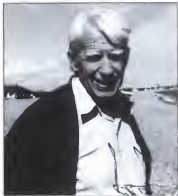
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Or enter online at www.poetry.com

The poem should be no more than 20 lines, and the poet's name and address must appear on the top of the page. "All poets who enter will receive a response concerning their artistry, usually within seven weeks," indicated Mr. Ely.

Possible Publication

Many submitted poems will also be considered for inclusion in one of The National Library of Poetry's forthcoming hardbound



Gordon Steele of Virginia, pictured above, is the latest Grand Prize Winner in The National Library of Poetry's North American Open Amateur Poetry Contest. As the big winner, he was awarded \$1,000.00 in cash.

anthologies. Previous anthologies published by the organization have included *On the Threshold of a Dream*, *Days of Future's Past*, *Of Diamonds and Rust*, and *Moments More to Go*, among others.

"Our anthologies routinely sell out because they are truly enjoyable reading, and they are also a sought-after sourcebook for poet talent," added Mr. Ely.

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edge of town. He is the spirit of the road at dusk, the one that runs from one town to another and belongs to neither. Travelers used to mark such roads with cairns, each adding a stone to the pile in passing. The name Hermes once meant 'he of the stone heap,' which tells us that the cairn is more than a trail marker—it is an altar to the forces that govern these spaces of heightened uncertainty.... The road that Trickster travels is a spirit road as well as a road in fact. He is the adept who can move between heaven and earth, and between the living and the dead."

Trickster is one who passes unhindered through the borderlands; the rest of us must confront the guardians who protect or bar the doors leading from the world we know to the hidden realms beyond. Janus is the two-faced Roman god of doorways, thresholds, and beginnings, an ancient figure sacred to pre-Latin inhabitants of Italy. Cardea is the goddess of door hinges, mistress to Janus and protector of children from vampire-witches disguised as night birds. According to Robert Graves' *White Goddess*, Cardea was once propitiated at weddings with torches of hawthorne. She had the power "to open what is shut; and shut what is open." A variety of other guardians (gods, faeries, supernatural spirits) watch over sacred groves, glens, rivers, pools, and wells. Some faeries guard whole forests and mountains, while others guard individual trees, hills, stones—and hidden faery treasure.

Treasure guardians can be appeased, tricked, outwitted, even slain—but usually at a higher price than one wants to pay. Sometimes it's the land itself preventing access into realms beyond. In "Thomas the Rhymer," a river of blood stands between Faerie and mortal worlds, and Thomas must pay the price of seven years' servitude to make that crossing. One princess must climb seven iron mountains to reach the land where her love is imprisoned; another must trick the winds into carrying her where her feet cannot. In *Sleeping Beauty*, a magical hedge of thorns divides the castle from the world, and cannot be penetrated til time, blood, and prophesy align.

Many fantasy tales grow from the desire to find the hidden "door in the hedge" (to borrow a phrase from Robin McKinley's excellent story of that title). Unlike Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, set entirely in his invented landscape, these tales bring us from the world we know through magic portals into worlds of wonder—a device used most famously in C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, but also in Andre Norton's *Witchworld* books, Pamela Dean's *Secret Country* trilogy, Stephen R. Donaldson's *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever*, Greg Bear's *Songs of Earth and Power*, Richard Bowes's unusual novel *The Feral Cell*, and the excellent, underrated books of Joyce Ballou Gregorian's *Tredana* trilogy: *The Broken Citadel*, *Castledown*, and *The Great Wheel*.

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Wenderson, The Witch of the Woods
Volume 1

In *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, the great Irish fantasist Lord Dunsany created a landscape poised on the border between mortal and magical realms. Anything that lies between is traditionally a place of potent enchantment: a bridge between two banks of a river; the silver light betwixt night and day; the moment between dreaming and waking; the motion of shape-shifting transformation; and all those interstitial realms where cultures, myths, landscapes, languages, art forms, and genres meet.

The King of Elfland's Daughter had a strong influence on a series of books I co-created with Ellen Kushner, Midori Snyder, Charles de Lint, and a number of other authors many years ago: coming-of-age tales for teenagers in which the border between the Elflands and the mortal world is an urban one. The setting of *Borderland* grew, at least consciously, from the street life of '80s-era New York, and the colorfully squalid "squatting" scene of London in the previous decade (where I'd been a college student short on cash and common sense)—yet a few years ago, Claire F. Fox presented a fascinating paper at the annual symposium on Art and Culture at New York's Whitney Museum (subsequently expanded and published in *Social Text* #41) exploring the *Borderland* books in relation to Mexican-American border arts, drawing fascinating parallels at both political and archetypal levels. Since that time I've paid more attention to the theme of

"border crossing," finding it central to my interests and work; it is also a theme one finds widely present in the modern fantasy field. (For those interested in such connections, a Day of the Dead story by Ellen Steiber brings Mexican "border arts" directly into the latest *Borderland* anthology: *The Essential Bordertown*.)

Magical "border crossing" works can also be found on the mainstream fiction shelves. Rick Collignon's *The Journal of Antonio Montoya*, Pat Mora's *House of Houses*, Alfredo Vega Jr.'s *La Maravilla*, Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer* are all extraordinary books where the membrane between the worlds of the living and the dead is thin and torn. In Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, Trickster crosses easily from mythic to modern worlds; while in *Antelope Wife* by Louise Erdrich these worlds are sewn together into the intricate patterns of beadwork. For works addressing the particular magic of the border region of the American Southwest, I recommend *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel (and the movie based on it), *Spirits of the Ordinary* by Kathleen Alcala, and Leslie M. Silko's wide-ranging refutation of borders, *The Almanac of the Dead*. *Border Beat*, a charmingly quirky quarterly journal of Mexican-American border arts (Jim Carvalho, publisher), is available by subscription from Dog Eat Dog Publishing, 5347 East Fort Lowell Rd., Tucson, AZ 85712. Nonfiction recommendations: *The Days of the Dead*, a gorge-

ous book of photographs by John Greenleugh; *In the Eye of the Sun: Mexican Fiestas*, mystical photographs by Geoff Winningham; *The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico* by Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayer; *Yaqui Deer Songs* by Larry Evers and Felipe S. Molina; *The Autobiography of a Yaqui Poet* by Refugio Savala; *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art* by Lewis Hyde; *Hermes the Thief* by Norman O. Brown; *Gods and Heroes of the Celts* by Marie-Louise Sjoestedt; *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* by Barbara G. Walker; and *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols* by J.C. Cooper.

We cross the border every time we step from the mundane world to the lands of myth, from mainstream culture to the pages of a folklore text or a fantasy book. Standing at the crossroads, we must remember to give food to Hecate, wine to Janus, flowers, songs, smoke, and dreams to all the guardians along the way. Tricksters, shamans, artists, story-tellers: they all cast paths of marigold petals and open the doors hidden in the hedge. As a fantasist, I cannot resist an unknown road or an open gate. I'm still that child in a graveyard at dusk, willing magic into existence. ♦

With thanks, once again, to Ellen Steiber. Previous Folkroots columns can be found on the Endicott Studio web site: <http://www.endicott-studio.com/index.html>



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BOOKS

Continued from page 16

supposedly benign Man on the Moon with its steam-producing underground works and that of Saruman's malodorous establishment. What can it mean?

And have I mentioned *Roverandom's* fun to read?

—Gahan Wilson

Dragon's Winter, by Elizabeth A. Lynn; Ace Books, NY; 341 pp.; hardcover; \$21.95

The dragon in *Dragon's Winter* is one of the book's changelings, supernatural folk who are essentially human but who can magically transform into a given animal and who also have related magical powers. Changelings live among humankind, and their blood mingles freely. Typically, in families with a changeling parent, some children will be changeling and some will not. One such family, and an intense sibling rivalry, sets the story of *Dragon's Winter* in motion.

The dragon changeling, Karadur Atani, is the lord of the small kingdom of Ippa. Karadur's jealous human brother, Tenjiro, turns to sorcery to try to obtain the changeling nature and throne that he believes are rightfully his. But what Tenjiro thinks is his own sorcery really emanates from an ancient evil, Ankoku, the Dark Mage, a wizard who was defeated and

bound in the legendary Mage Wars and who is now an immaterial residue that can only live and act through another. Tenjiro steals from Karadur the talisman that every changeling needs to change form, abetted by Karadur's lover and, now Ankoku's tool, wages war from Ankoku's reactivated Black Citadel and its ever-growing, magically generated icy wasteland.

The other changelings we meet are Wolf, Hawk, and Bear—old comrades, strangers from another land—who are drawn into Karadur's struggle against Tenjiro, and Gorthas, the evil warg changeling who is Ankoku's henchman. These are colorful characters, realistic but also larger than life—especially the dramatic Karadur, who is almost always seen through the other characters' eyes—and they easily stand out in a crowded, sometimes overcrowded, cast. The self-contained, bookish Hawk, as able a human archer as she is a supernatural tracker, is especially memorable, and eventually becomes the most engaging character.

Dragon's Winter is a tale of cruelty and tragedy as well as of adventure and beauty. No one emerges from its events physically and emotionally unscathed. The atrocities committed by Tenjiro-Ankoku, Gorthas, and their wargs and mercenaries are described in steady, unsparring detail. Along with magic powers, changeling blood always brings with it the danger that the possessor's human identity will be overwhelmed:

Karadur's father had gone wild in his dragon form and destroyed an entire city before being killed. Karadur himself, as a human, is plagued by the temper, violent and sometimes uncontrollable, that is intrinsic to his dragon nature.

Dragon's Winter is marvelously written. Lynn's prose, plain and unpretentious but meticulously observant, brings the characters and surroundings to life in a fresh torrent of clear, vivid impressions, of sights and sounds, tastes and smells. The concise writing and economical construction enable Lynn to tell a complex story, teeming with characters and subplots and spanning several years, in a relatively small space without rush or synopsis, producing an absorbing, swiftly unfolding tale. A sequel is already on the way, and there are a few signs: The story comes to a satisfying close, but the last 30 pages continue beyond it, and even add new characters and complications, as if laying groundwork for the book to come; some of the characters' stories, notably Hawk's, seem unfinished. But Lynn has been careful here too, and the effect of all this doesn't detract from the whole. Atmospheric and powerful, *Dragon's Winter* is a remarkable accomplishment.

Correction: My review last issue was mistakenly printed without the title of the book. It is *Smith of Wootton Major* [Farmer Giles of Ham, by J.R.R. Tolkien.

—Jeanne Cavelos



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Swords Against the Shadowland

by Robin Wayne Bailey

ISBN 1-56504-893-8

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Just before Fritz Leiber's passing in 1992, he and Robin Wayne Bailey announced plans to collaborate on a new series of novel-length adventures featuring Leiber's heroic characters, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. Now, taking up the challenge alone, Bailey returns to Lankhmar with a dark tale of obsessive love and sorcery gone horribly wrong.

*"Somewhere in Lankhmar,
Fritz is smiling."*

—Dennis L. McKiernan,
author of *Hell's Crucible* duology

Irrational Fears

by William Browning Spencer

ISBN 1-56504-915-2

\$19.99 August 98

If Kafka had gone to AA, hooked up with Philip K. Dick, and collaborated on a novel about alcoholism and recovery, something like *Irrational Fears* might have resulted.

William Browning Spencer, the author of the award-winning *Résumé with Monsters*, has created a novel for the curmudgeonly reader unable to stomach one more fictional account or memoir in which a plucky hero or heroine battles the dark forces of alcoholism and triumphs through strength of character and personal charm; here is an AA novel for the malcontent.



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FLOWER KISS

Great folk tales appear in many guises in many cultures. Here is one of the most fascinating.

BY CONSTANCE ASH
Illustration by Web Bryant

MY MOTHER'S BENZ was large and possessed of excellent air conditioning. Nevertheless, we girl-children—some of us cousins, some of us siblings (half and entire), some of us aunts and nieces to each other, one or two of us all of the above — were dreadfully impatient to arrive at our YaYa's house. Once there, we charged through the servants who held open the great front doors for the family. Up the wide stairs to the gallery where our grandmother kept state we raced faster than horses on the track outside the city.

"YaYa, Oldest Mother," we cried. We threw ourselves into her lap. We tumbled into a pile around her handsomely shod feet, the feet on which she had leaped higher than anyone else in the world. "Tell us a story, tell us a story," we demanded.

Our YaYa sat in silence, one perfectly made-up eyebrow cocked at us. We silenced ourselves. We curtsied, one-by-one. Then we were allowed to kneel in a half-circle around her. She greeted us with elaborate courtesy, each by name. She measured our growth since our last visit. She asked about our schools, and future plans for study. She focused on hearing us, which she politely concealed behind servant-borne platters of the foods we loved so much — sweet millet fritters, balls of honey and yam rolled in coconut, wraps of mango with plantain, oh so many good things to eat.

Finally, YaYa inquired, "Shall I tell a story of when the world was so young that First Mother carried it in her baby backslings?"

"Honored YaYa, only, if you please, instead, a story of a girl who is like the girls we are," we pleaded.

ONCE UPON A TIME OLAIDE LIVED WITH HER FATHER AND HER mother up in the Heights among the city's happiest people, in a house named Beija-Flor. From every window there was a splendid view down to the lagoon filled by the blue waters of the Guinea Gulf, where the shallows hosted a fishing village raised on stilts. Beija-Flor was a *sobrado*, built in the last century by skilled Brazilian slaves. These slaves had come as chattel possessed by Brazilian freemen, who had chosen to return to the visible world where their Ancestors had been betrayed by their own. To avenge their enslaved Ancestors departed long ago to the invisible world, the New World freemen became slave traders and enormously happy in their turn.

Olaide's clan had changed trades at the arrival of the French, but the new one put offerings inside the altar hut equally rich as slaving had done. Her parents' marriage brought together the brewers of the Coast's highest quality beer with control of the Coast's distribution network for all the coastal brands available between the River and the Equator.

While still a Baby-child Mother told Olaide, "In Portuguese, which our family always learns to speak, Beija-Flor means 'flower kiss.' This is what the people of Brazil name humming birds." Three-year-old Olaide danced her delight in receiving such big information — oh, how Olaide loved to dance!

Garlands of humming birds, like shards of stained glass, cascaded about Olaide as if juggled by a festival Stick Dancer. Olaide danced herself among the flowers that surrounded their house. "You are my very own little beija-flor, Olaide," her mother said. "You dance as lightly, as tirelessly, as a humming bird ascends, turns, dives, and then kisses its chosen blossom, hanging in place supported only by the churning of air beaten by its own wings."

Beija-Flor was an enormous blue-walled, rectangular two-story building with a mansard roof. Portuguese-style tiles, *azulejos*, were mortared in patterns of animals, birds, fish, and foliage on the walls and the floors. A proper *sobrado's* north wall remained unpierced so that the dust-laden *harmattan*, on which ifrits and hyena witches rejoiced to ride, could not enter the house.

However, the other three of its walls each contained arched windows and two doors with upper panels of glass. These panes, to match the *azulejos*, were stained palm-oil red, saffron, orchid, avocado, and indigo. Sunlight through the glass splashed these colors upon the floor, walls, and rails of a circular gallery. Shadows puddled among the lamp holders, stools, and cushions, shadows that delighted bats, cats, birds, and little girls. Oh, how often Olaide thought she loved the gallery best of all the parts of her mother's house, which kept her family safe from all harm!

But then, Olaide would think of the courtyard behind the house, which was the same as her heart within her breast. There was the ancient altar hut. There grew the ancient, wide-spreading branches of a *ceiba*, their family's Spirit Tree, beneath which was buried her placenta and naval string, in company with those of generations of her clan.

The courtyard was spacious, planted with coconut palms, pumpkins, ground nuts, yams and hot peppers, pawpaws, oranges, guavas, and many other things to feed those who lived in the house. From dawn until the servants returned to their own places after their

work was finished, the courtyard was filled with the rhythms of millet, cassava, and laundry being pounded, all accompanied by the proper songs as well as the poultry's cuc-cuc-cuc. Years ago the servants would have been slaves, and would have slept in the quarter, now decayed behind a quickest hedge. Lamps were lit along this hedge at night so that people living in the house, and their visitors, could avoid treading in laundry water, avoid tripping over the *ceiba's* roots that coiled above the ground like the coils of Dan Wédo, the family Foddún-Serpent who coiled happily around its branches, and avoid bumping into the altar hut where the Ancestors and other *foddúces* kept hospitable state.

Olaide's mother was her father's only wife, which some might regard as *outré*, as Olaide was not a son, and was her father's only child. The old Brazilian-style mansion, able to shelter a numerous lineage, contained only the servants, Monsieur and Madame, and Olaide. But Monsieur frequently declared his perfect satisfaction in his lovely and beloved wife, and his daughter, who jumped so high when she danced. Dancing took most of her time until Olaide began

school, where she happily studied Egyptian hieroglyphics, Arabian mathematics, Asian cinema, European history, French, of course, and English.

Aiyee! Alas! Some years after Olaide began attending the St. Mary's School for Girls, her mother died.

It was as terrible a thing for Olaide to lose her mother as it would be for any of us. After weeping day and night throughout the rainy season, Olaide began to find some solace again in her books and teachers, and from knowing that her mother's spirit was watching over her from the invisible realm the Ancestors shared with the *foddúces*. Mother would be reborn again, perhaps when Olaide became a mother herself.

The girl scored the highest number in the competitive examinations for a place in the city's International Community School. Her father came close to making enemies out of his many friends by afflicting them with endless boredom, for he talked his pride in his daughter's achievement everywhere, all the time, for days and days.

"You are going abroad to study in a great American university after you graduate from the ICS," he told her. "This will be your best preparation to become head of our businesses when my spirit goes to the invisible realm. You will have one of the high positions among our city's secret society of Market Nanas, just as your mother did."

When she was 14, standing together on Beija-Flor's gallery overlooking the sea, her father told her very large news indeed.

"I am to take a new wife," he told her. "You must have no fears for anything. You are my true child, and forever most dear to me. Nothing will change other than our lives will be more comfortable. My new wife is very beautiful, and very shrewd, but she's not educated like you and your mother. She is a tragic, mistreated woman with two daughters. She comes from the herding peoples who dominate the northern savannahs. Her brothers have advertised their desire of her sale, and more to the point, her dowerless daughters, away from their kraals. She and her daughters will be most grateful to us for bringing them to the city and a house. All three have said they expect nothing from our property except decent maintenance and a generous dower for the two sisters. They agree that my estate can only be yours, child of my dearly beloved and never-to-be-forgotten first wife, as well as true child of our lineage and clan."

While her mother's loss would forever be recalled and regretted, her father's marriage made Olaide happy. She had always wanted sisters and this new mother brought her two older ones. Most of all,

You must
be a witch!
Only a witch
could be so
male in her
defiance.

Olaide wanted a baby sister. If the Ancestors willed it, the new mother would provide. At her father's wedding no one danced with more grace and endurance than Olaide, not even the humming birds that darted to kiss the sweet, fortified wines that were as thick upon the table that day as the flowers that wound about Beija-Flor.

Upon their reunion after the wedding journey, her father was even more quiet than he'd become after her mother's death. He said, "Your new mother suffered terrible things in her life before us. We will be very kind to her."

Her new mother made no attempts to change anything about Olaide's ways of living. But she would not allow either her husband or her stepdaughter to help her own daughters enter school. She said in her family only boys studied, and what they studied was the Secret Book of the Prophet. She added that the ways of girls and women here, and how they went about the city alone or in each other's company, frightened her. She feared corruption of her daughters' perfect morals if exposed to the uncontrolled aspects of public life. Olaide thought she comprehended these misgivings; therefore she offered to teach her stepsisters and stepmother to read and write at home. They shyly refused.

Olaide's invitation to her new mother and sisters to visit the altar hut put her stepmother into a paroxysm of grief, however. "I can no longer deny that I'm in a foreign land, where even in my house I am surrounded by those who are condemned," she sobbed.

Her father, grieving for his wife's many griefs, more than willing to provide anything to amend her early, unhealable wounds, allowed his new wife to cut a window in the north wing of Beija-Flor.

From one full Moon to the next, the servants were trained to name the north wing "the women's apartments." They learned no male but Olaide's father, or a eunuch, was allowed to enter. The stepmother spent most of her days there. She smoked. She ate enormously. For the tailoring of scores of new gowns she selected rich materials, which were exhibited to her privately by apprentices to the Head Market Nana. Since she could neither read nor write any language, she taught the eunuch messengers what to say to her northern brothers. She received messages from them in return. She gazed out the window toward her old home in the north.

Olaide was sorely disappointed that her stepsisters would not climb the Spirit Tree and visit Dan Wêdo, or make with her the runs that were like being a horse on the racetrack, up and down the roads of the Heights that twisted and turned like a snake's path. They did not like to wear shoes. Saddest of all they did not want to learn the competitive leaping dances that the city's Women's Secret Societies performed to acclaim up and down the Coast. Olaide could not understand it. Her stepsisters said it hurt them to do those things. They were grateful, they told her, that her father kept servants. Pounding millet and cassava, grinding corn, fetching water, and all the rest of women's daily work hurt them too, but up in the north, poor and without servants, they'd worked from before sunrise until long after sunset for their uncles' families. After their father had died, they'd not had so much as a pair of plastic sandals for their own. If there was any wish they could have granted, they said, it would be to have their uncles' wives in the same position that they'd been to them after their father's death.

Olaide went about her own business, alone as before, with studies at the International Community School, feeding Dan Wêdo in the *ceiba* tree and the *fodduces* in the altar hut, and always, dance practice with young girls' auxiliaries to the Women's Secret Societies of the city. It became an occasion when her stepsisters joined her father and herself in the dining room, for they seldom came out of the women's apartment now. She saw her stepmother even less.

Then, one day, Olaide came home from school, and there she was, the most beautiful, roasted coffee-berry colored, bright-eyed, brand-new baby sister anyone could wish for!

Now Olaide spent much of her free time in the women's apartment herself. Baby Sister always laughed and reached out her arms from the wet nurse's lap when her Big Sister came into view. Olaide sang to the infant the songs her mother had sung about Dan Wêdo and the other *fodduces*, about humming birds, and how the Ancestors conversed

among themselves in the branches of the *ceiba* tree in the courtyard.

There was a day after school when Baby Sister, now a plump toddler who proudly navigated Beija Flor's stairs all by herself, wasn't waiting when the butler opened the door for Olaide. Instead, she heard the child sobbing behind the doors of the women's apartment. When Olaide tried to enter, her father refused to let her in.

She heard Father shouting, "Why, why?"

She heard her stepmother weeping, "I don't know!"

Father shouted, "You did it! How can you not know?"

Her father kept asking, Each time her stepmother cried a different answer. "I had to! My mother made me do it!"

"Your mother is dead!" Father cried.

"She will never be married otherwise! God says we must. She was dirty that way. You are like the dogs and the pigs, a fetishist, one who doesn't know God! It happened to me, why not to her?"

When he came out, her father was even more quiet than after the wedding journey. Although Olaide wasn't allowed into the north apartment to see Baby Sister, she knew the toddler was there. And then, one day, she knew the little girl was gone.

Once more there was a loud, weeping argument behind the closed door. "Where is our Baby-Child?" her father demanded.

"To my brothers' wives, by the eunuch messenger," her father's wife responded, with a shameful exhibition of sullen and stubborn anger. For once Olaide wished her father was like northern husbands, who would beat their wives for such behavior. But her father was a gentleman, who believed such behavior was crude and backward.

Shortly after, very suddenly, her father died in the north wing. The funeral rites were extensive and expensive, according to his standing in the city, and according to what the *fodduces* directed, as interpreted by the *houngan*. Olaide's stepmother was present, but didn't participate. Her grief paralyzed her, she explained. The city gossiped that Olaide's father had married no lady. When her mother had died, Olaide still had her father. She thought perhaps if she still had Baby Sister, she might be happy again one day, but the child had disappeared, never to return, like her mother had, and now her father too. She had never known that a person could be this unhappy.

Soon after, her stepmother exchanged all the old, family servants for foreign ones. When her male relatives from the north arrived, the stepmother locked Olaide in the house. With the help of her daughters, she forced the grief-prostrated girl to burn her International School uniforms, the book satchel of which she was so proud, and all her books. Her stepmother announced that Olaide was to be married — to one of her stepmother's own brothers!

But first, the *thing* must be done to Olaide, to make her marriageable.

"I am too young to marry! My father had determined I was to master many accomplishments before I married. I must finish school and then go to university abroad! Then I shall be Head of my family's business. He would never have me marry a man from the north, never, never, never, for they would have this *thing* done to me, and he despised this *thing*!" Olaide cried.

The stepmother bared her teeth. "You have said it. Your father despised me. He wanted me only to be slave to you, his precious, heathen fetish daughter to whom he has left all the big money. But, when you marry, by the laws of this whole land, the fortune my husband left for you, which I am not allowed to touch for myself or my children, will then belong to your husband, who will be gratefully generous to his sister and her children."

However, the fortune was in Europe, the house, the businesses and the family were in the city, and Olaide, who had achieved the age of reason, and who had been born into the standing of her mother's family, could not easily be forced to do anything against her will by a northern outsider who had no Ancestors, did not belong to any of the women's Secret Societies, nor rendered any service to the divine *fodduces*. Due to the current regional unrest, the President had placed armed checkpoints at each exit from the city. Thus the woman's family couldn't kidnap Olaide out to the north.

Her stepmother tried to bribe her with gifts, then she used anger to bend Olaide to her will, both to no avail.

"You must be a witch!" the woman screamed, while she struck the girl with her own hands. "Only a witch could be so male in her defiance."

She resorted to sorcery, but the Ancestors, several of whom had been great sorcerers themselves, warded their steadfast child from the work of mere market *jujus*.

They imprisoned her in the north apartment. That evening her stepsisters caught Olaide climbing out of the women's quarters by the window her stepmother had caused made. "Olaide, you have left me no other choice," the stepmother said.

Her daughters pulled the pretty shoes from her feet. The stepmother tore off her pretty clothes. They hit Olaide with a short, hard whip, until the blood came and the girl fell down. "These pains hurt our God-fearing souls more than they hurt your heathen body, but you have forced us to do this."

The stepmother and her daughters dragged Olaide out of Beja-Flor. Every floor and stair creaked and cracked in protest, though there had been nary a squeak previously. "This is Olaide's house, not yours," Beja-Flor cried from board and stone.

Olaide was dragged across the courtyard. The Ancestors' spirit voices cried from the leaves, the silk-cotton seeds, and the very branches of the *ceiba* tree, "Treachery! Treachery!"

Other voices cried from the altar hut. "A thieving foreigner among us!"

The outlander servants working in the courtyard closed their eyes and ears to their mistress's business. The stepmother boasted, "To survive now, you are entirely dependent upon the will of me and my family." But Olaide clung to the voices of her house, her Tree, and her altars, for they were hers now, and no one else's.

Olaide was pulled through the quickset hedge and along the row of old quarters to the slave wall built of wood from the iron tree. Steel rings were still riveted fast within the wall from which hung festoons of steel collars, wrist manacles, and ankle shackles. Olaide was fastened securely.

"After a night with the rats, the snakes, and the bloodsucking insects, we will see if you keep your masculine obstinacy," the stepmother said. "But first, I shall brand you with my brothers' sign."

The stepmother tripped over something she thought was a large, gnarled branch. Her girth fell hard upon her wrists. They were so strained she could hold neither the whip nor the brand, so had to give up the plan.

Olaide took great heart from this. She had recognized the stick as in truth the house python in which was seated Fodúin Dan Wédo. Dan Wédo summoned his wife, Ayida Wédo, who brought lesser snakes, as well as frogs and other vermin and insect-eating creatures. They protected Olaide all night long from the sucking, stinging, and biting.

In the morning the stepmother came to Olaide and demanded, "Now will you marry my brother?"

"No," Olaide said. "I will never be the means by which my family's things pass to a strange family."

"Then you shall be the one on whose labor my family's happiness is built!" Her stepmother tore Olaide from the slave wall, and, with her whip, drove the girl into the courtyard. She dismissed all the stranger servants. "Until you come to your senses and submit to my rule, you will take the servants' place."

Olaide said softly, "You are not from here. You do not understand. It is a well-known thing that if a man's wife dies, and leaves a child, and the man takes a new wife, that wife must look after the dead woman's child better than after her own children. Once she mistreats the dead woman's child, she will die. We know this very well here in the south. My mother said so."

The stepmother laughed heedlessly at Olaide's generous warning. Every sunrise the stepmother sent her two daughters to unchain Olaide, though they made sure the shackles that linked her ankles remained fast, along with the slave neck collar. Alas, even in those times slavery had not passed entirely from our visible world. All day she pounded the millet and the cassava in their great mortars, and the laundry in its enormous, heavy basins. She planted and

weeded and hoed the food plots. She wrenched the water up from the well, and prepared the meals. Although the stepsisters allowed her only scraps for herself, Olaide took the largest portion to the altar hut so those in the invisible world could feed. She sang the family songs to the Spirit Tree while she worked, and every 10 days shooed a plump chicken up into the Tree's branches where seated Fodúin Dan Wédo in the python.

In return, the Spirit Tree reached out its broad leaves and wove a shelter from the threads in its silk-cotton fruits to protect Olaide from the fierce Sun of day, and the cold rains of night. The python frightened away the wicked men attending the stepmother's brother, who consumed the substance of Beja-Flor, and who had the brother's permission to sport with Olaide while she was chained to the wall. By moonlight the lesser snakes ruled by the Wédo husband and wife *fodduces* fed the mouth of the starving, suffering girl with boiled eggs, roast yams, shrimp and acassa balls, which they brought in their snaky mouths.

Most of all the Spirit Tree, the Ancestors and Fodúin Dan Wédo gave the girl courage to maintain right action, and the steadfastness to stay the path that her father and her mother had chosen for her. Despite what her stepmother and her family could do to her, Olaide's spine remained straight, which allowed the Spirit Power to run cleanly from her feet to the top of her head, where the *fodduces* were pleased to seat themselves, lending her their strength and their protection.

The night which was the first dark of the Moon since her evil stepmother made Olaide a slave, the evil stepmother and sisters came stealthily to the wall, barely illuminated by a paraffin lamp. In the wicked woman's hand was the razor with which she intended to do that terrible thing to Olaide, to cut off the parts between her legs that they named men's parts — filthy, unseemly for a woman to keep — which must be removed to make her a true woman and be married to the brother.

The two stepsisters carried dull bone needles and coarse, dirty thread to sew her up again, tight shut. They held Olaide down on the ground. "You felt sorry for us because we cannot run and jump like men. Now, you'll be a woman too!" they gleefully declared.

They put their hands over her mouth, yet her heart screamed to the Ancestors, her heart screamed to the *fodduces* for protection from evil.

At each scream a Spirit Wind whipped the branches of the Spirit Tree and the ancient vines that twined like the python around them. They beat that bad woman's head! The Beja-Flor python flowed like black water across the ground, and up and around the hand and arm that held the terrible razor, and bore the razor away.

Terrified, the woman and her daughters ran into the house, leaving Olaide safe.

They returned with the next dark of the Moon, this time with the machete that hacked open coconuts. Again the Spirit Wind blew up, and a branch from the Tree knocked the machete right from that wicked woman's hand! Again the python of Beja-Flor bore away the terrible weapon, and the terrified woman and her daughters ran away.

The third dark of the Moon they came with the axe that chopped off the chickens' heads. Once more, the Tree, the Ancestors, and the *fodduces* protected their loyal child.

Olaide wept. "Mother, oh Mother, how your heart would break if you would see your little Beja-Flor this way! Must it be, every Moon cycle, those evil persons will come to chop and hack and shave away my precious, pretty, perfect and private parts in order to marry me to that monster brother and take away for him all that was yours and father's, and which now is only mine? Truly, I would let them have the fortune and the businesses, if only I could keep what is most truly mine, my precious and pure woman's parts."

A tendril of wind, laden with the perfume of flowers that surrounded the house of Beja-Flor, which was the perfume her mother always wore, flowed from the Tree. She inhaled. She breathed in the dead, who were part of the Tree's exhalation, thick as water, which holds one up. She exhaled. Her most precious and pure Ancestor Spirits came out on her wind to surround her pretty body. The Ancestor Spirits were restless, angry that their harmonious family peace had

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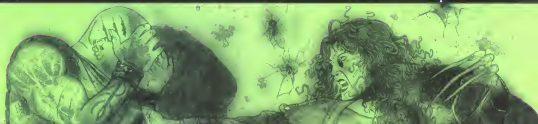
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been broken by the wicked woman, her wicked daughters, and her wicked brother. The scented wind wafted through the leaves, its wake trailing cries high as a wounded bird's, the voices of the Spirit Tree.

"Beija-Flor, my little humming bird, my little Kisser of Flowers. This is a terrible thing that is being done to you. But with the help of the *fodduces* we will defeat this wicked woman who slaves you in order to steal our home." That voice, not heard for so many regretful years except in her dreams, was her mother's!

Small giggles and chortles of delight greeted Olaide. Olaide's heart jumped in her breast. It was Baby Sister! How could that be? Olaide peered and peered into the dark, she pulled as far from the chain wall as her shackles allowed, but she saw no chubby, merry, toddling form. Then she comprehended the meaning of Baby Sister's mystery. The stepmother had lied to Father and to everyone. She was not visiting stepmother's family in the north. Baby Sister was dead, from the terrible cutting of her tiny, perfect baby-girl parts. Baby Sister's spirit had fled her mother's cruel lineage and joined to the Beija-Flor Spirit Tree because of Big Sister's devotion, and the blood that they shared.

Spirit Tree's leaves shook out her mother's voice. Its branches yearned toward the girl, dropping leaves, soft as her mother's kisses, on Olaide's hot and dirty face.

"Your release, dear Humming Bird, is near, but it is to be found within you, nowhere else. Dance, my little Flower Kiss, practice your humming-bird dance tomorrow, and every day thereafter, and you shall see what you shall see."

Dance? Dance as the humming birds did, those brilliant, flashing flower kissers who could dash to the orchids twined at the tops of the tallest silk cotton tree? With her ankles locked in shackles? What could her mother be meaning? Nevertheless, this was her mother's spirit, who, along with the other Ancestors and the *fodduces*, had protected her for so long from the wicked stepmother's implements of cutting, and her equally wicked brother. Somehow, Olaide would accomplish her mother's instruction, with the Ancestors' and *fodduces*' help. Despite chains and collar, she took remarkable ease from the bed of rags, leaves, and silk-cotton that Tree and snakes had provided. Her sleep was deep and refreshing.

To follow her mother's advice, there was no help for it — she must jump while shackled, practice her rhythms while she performed the day's labors. She focused all her breath into her bent knees each time the weighty pestle pounded into the millet barrel, or upon the cassava squeeze tray. Putting her breath into her knees achieved spring in her feet and calves when her arms swung the pestle above her in preparation for another beat. When she lost her rhythm she would fall, which hurt, and thus she became all the more focused in her practicing. The outlanders' greedy consumption of millet and cassava kept her at practice for long periods every single day. The Tree sent rivers of pure air into her lungs, which made her body, the heavy wooden pestle, and her chains buoyant as feathers. Soon, she was able to sing the words of her age-set's songs in the proper rhythm with her beats and her leaps.

One morning Olaide was deeply engaged with variations of the rhythm by which she beat the millet. It took some little time before she became aware that other persons were in the courtyard. They were ugly, dirty, and covered with sores. Nevertheless, Olaide greeted the women with all the dignity and courtesy of right behavior that any young person owed any older person, whatever their state.

"Be welcome and allow this house shelter you, honored visitors. Please, allow me to wash your faces, hands, and feet; provide you seats, though they be only swept dirt; cool drinks, though they be

only well water; and a bit to eat, though that be only the leftovers of the breakfast millet gruel."

The stepmother and her daughters rushed into the courtyard.

A very strange thing happened. The dirty, ugly, sick women became clean, healthy, and much younger. The servant was very pretty, but the Nana, oh-la-la, her beauty was beyond dazzlement.

The Nana's heavy gold jewelry, elegant fly whisk, magnificent pagné, low-cut tunic, and crisp head tie made the girl recall that filthy rags barely covered her nakedness, and that she'd bathed only in used laundry water since she'd become a slave. The servant, who carried the Nana's accouterments of perfume bottle, sunglasses, fan, and mirror, was dressed as beautifully as her mistress. Other things the Nana's clothes told her, through the choice of color and pattern, choices of accouterments and jewelry. She was the Head of the Market Women's Secret Society, as well as the Head of the age-set society to which Olaide's mother had belonged. She was also the

Head of the Society that served Fódúnn Ézilie Doba, the Grand Ézilie, the Ancestor of the entire Ézilie family of *fodduces*, who owned and protected beauty, romance and marriage, inheritance and prosperity, and the sexual lives of women and men. You would never, never wish to offend Doba, never, never.

"We are come to visit Olaide, the daughter of this house. The press of business has been so great with all this unsettlement of politics, we Market Nanas have been remiss in our duty to the spirit of Olaide's mother, who was dear to us all."

The stepmother shouted, "Go away! Olaide has done witchcraft. She is isolated to contain the spread of her evil and to cure her."

Olaide's face went hot with shame that she must witness all the right behavior of hospitality flouted. This was a large filth upon the honor of Beija-Flor.

"Your words are regrettable," the Nana said softly, in a voice that contained all enchantments. "However, we are informing Olaide that she is invited to perform tonight for Americans on the Market ground."

She addressed the humiliated girl directly. "These Americans are searching out the most talented dancers for a touring *Fête des Africains*. Olaide, you are the very best dancer in your age-set. Your talents can earn you this

wonderful opportunity to see America."

Again, the Nana showed up the stepmother's poor manners. "Your daughters, of course, are also invited to compete."

"Neither my daughters, nor I, dance," the stepmother said with haughtiness.

The glossy brows above limpid eyes, highlighted with cosmetics that shimmered like humming-bird plumage, contracted in polite sympathy. "A thousand pardons. I recollect now that you are a northern woman. My heart bleeds for your condition, but nevertheless, you have the obligation to help Olaide fulfill her obligations," the Nana said, "so you will enable her to attend the exhibition-competition tonight."

Followed by her pretty servant, the Nana took her leave. Her perfectly formed body swayed with the most seductive movements as she went through the gates. Her bewitching perfume hung in the air. The glamorous pattern of her braids above the head tie she wore, the perfect alignments of her beautiful face remained in the mind's eye. Immediately, the brother and his attendants, who spied on the courtyard from the men's apartments, trailed out of the gates of Beija-Flor in turn, muttering that the visitor needed to be followed to ensure she make no trouble for them.

Continued on page 47

The Ancestors' spirit voices cried from the leaves, "Treachery!"

A huntress who is hunted.
A woman who is wolf. A life that is legend.

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THE

SILVER WOLF

Dear Reader:

It is with immense joy that I introduce to you a daring and vibrant new voice on the female literary frontier—a writer with the vision and scope to conjure up her own thrilling mythos and the craftsmanship to render it in breathtaking, shimmering prose.

In this hypnotic novel, the decadence and splendor of ancient Rome come vividly to life through a character as enigmatic as my very own Lestat. Exotic and beautiful, young Regeane is kin to Charlemagne. Yet she is distinguished by something infinitely greater than her royal blood. For Regeane is a shapeshifter—both woman and wolf—with centuries of latent primacy pulsing through her soul. And now the day has arrived when her heritage—both seductive gift and lonesome curse—spills passionately into an opulent world of intrigue and twisted ambitions.

Beating with the rich cadences of a bygone era and peopled with characters that beckon to the deepest reaches of our souls, *The Silver Wolf* is a stunning initiation into a dark and dazzling realm. My pride and enthusiasm for this brilliant writer's debut is doubly great because we have shared a rich and wondrous tradition of storytelling since childhood. Even so, my words fail to fully prepare you for the enchantment you are about to experience. Readers, fans, friends...I present to you my sister...Alice Borchardt.

Sincerely,
Anne Rice



THE SILVER WOLF



In this mesmerizing novel of stunning originality and scope, Alice Borchardt breathes life into a bygone age, brilliantly re-creating a sensuous, violent world—and the men and women whose grand ambitions, betrayals, and passions shape the era in which they live and die.

“I was born of darkness. My father’s eyes closed before mine opened. I am not of this world or the other, and I have the right to be what I am...”

The sun was going down. The fiery circle shone past the acanthus-crowned columns of a ruined temple, which cut the incandescent ball into slices of red radiance. Almost night, the girl thought, then shivered in the chill autumn air blowing through the unglazed casement.

The window was barred—heavily barred. The bars were bolted into the stone walls of the tiny room. One set running horizontally, the other vertically.

She knew she could close the window. Reach out through the bars. Pull the

heavy shutters shut, and seal them with an iron bolt. But she pushed the idea out of her mind with a sort of blind obstinacy. The sight of freedom, even an unattainable freedom, was too sweet to give up.

Not yet, she told herself, only a little longer. Not yet.

The air that raised gooseflesh on her arms was sweet to her nostrils. Oh no, more than sweet. A speaking thing. Each vagrant increase in flow, each slight change in direction, each passing movement sent images to the deepest part of her mind.

Somewhere a patch of thyme bloomed. The tiny blue flowers let their fragrance into the chill evening air. This delicate scent was mixed with the heavy smell of wet marble and granite. These and



THE SILVER WOLF

many others stood out against the tapestry of odors given off by the flowers and greenery that cloaked the ruined palaces and temples of the ancient imperium.

The vast restless spirit of this, the greatest of all empires, seemed at last brought to rest at the soft hand of the great mother herself.

Regeane didn't know what she'd expected of the once-proud mistress of the world when she'd come to Rome. Certainly not what she found.

The inhabitants, descendants of a race of conquerors, lived like rats squabbling and polluting the ruins of an abandoned palace. Oblivious to the evidence of grandeur all around them, they fought viciously among themselves for what wealth remained. Indeed, little was left of the once-vast river of gold that flowed into the eternal city. The gold that could be found gilded the papal officials and the altars of the many churches.

Regeane's mother, desperate to save—as she saw it—her daughter's soul, pawned what few jewels she had left. The money was sufficient to pay the bribes necessary to obtain a papal audience and finance the equally expensive papal blessing.

Regeane had gone into the awesome presence, her body drenched in a sweat of terror. If her ailing mother said the wrong thing to the church's leading prelate, she might find herself being burned or stoned as a witch. But as she approached the supreme pontiff, she real-

ized just how foolish her fears had been.

The man before her was a ruin. Ready to be taken by age and sorrow. She doubted if he understood much of anything said to him. Weeping, her mother implored the intercession of God's chief minister on earth with the Almighty. As the ever-dutiful Regeane knelt, kissed the silken slipper, and felt the withered hands pressed against her hair, she caught a whiff of a scent other than the thick smell of incense and Greek perfume that pervaded the room: the musty, dry smell of aging flesh and human decay.

God, it was powerful. He is ready to die, she thought. He will go in person to speak to God on Mother's behalf very soon. She knew this blessing, as all other blessings her mother, Gisela, had traveled so far and squandered so much of her wealth to gain, would do no good.

This was the end. Regeane knew it. She was frightened. If the pope himself could not lift this strange gesa from her and let her live as a woman, to what earthly power could she turn? More to the point, to what power could her mother turn?

Gisela was fading as quickly as the only-too-human man on the chair of Peter. Though a comparatively young woman, she was worn down by the string of fruitless journeys she had taken with Regeane and by some secret sorrow that seemed to fill her mind and heart with a bottomless well of grief.

Regeane lied. Her mother believed. And for the first time in many years,



THE SILVER WOLF

Regeane felt the tiny woman who had traveled so far and borne so many burdens was at peace. Regeane's lie carried Gisela through till the end.

Three days after the papal audience she had gone to awaken her mother and found Gisela would never wake again. Not in this world.

Regeane was alone.

She watched with greedy eyes as the sun became a half circle and faded into a glow silhouetting the tall cypress of the Appian Way, followed by the deep blue autumn twilight. Then, and only then, did she turn from the window and wrap herself in an old woolen mantle and return to her pallet bed. With the exception of the low bed and a small, covered, brown terracotta pot in the corner, the room was bare.

Regeane sat on her bed, shoulders against the stone wall, legs dangling, head thrown back, eyes closed. She waited silently for moonrise. The silver disc would be lifting itself above the seven hills now. Soon, very soon, its journey across the sky would bring it to her window where it would throw a pool of silver light on the floor. Ignoring the crosshatched blank lines of bars, she could drink at that pool. Allowed once more to breathe, if not to glory, in the air of freedom.

The door to the outer room slammed shut. Damnation. The girl on the bed scoured her mind for oaths. No...cures. Young girl that she was, she was never allowed to speak them, but she could think the words. And she often did.

Oh, how she did when those two were present. There were worse things than loneliness. Overall, Regeane felt she preferred silence and emptiness to the presence of either her Uncle Gundalbald or Hugo, his son.

"I pissed blood again this morning," Hugo whined. "Are all the whores in this city diseased?"

Gundalbald laughed uproariously. "All the ones you pick up seem to be. It's as I told you. Pay a little extra. Get yourself something young and clean. Or at least young, so all the itching and burning a few days later are worth it. That last you bought was so old, she had to ply her trade by starlight. What you save in cunt rent goes out in medicines for crotch rot."

"True enough," Hugo said irritably. "You always seem to do better."

Gundalbald sighed. "I'm sick of trying to instruct you. Next time, retain at least a modicum of sobriety and get a look at her in a good light."

"Christ, it's cold in here," Hugo said angrily. A second later Regeane heard him shouting down the stairs for the landlord to bring a brazier to warm the room.

"I can't see how you stand it," Gundalbald told him. "She's left the window open again."

Gundalbald laughed again. "There's nothing to worry about. Those planks are an inch thick. She can't get out."

"Has she ever...gotten out, I mean?" Hugo asked with fear in his voice.

"Oh, once or twice, I believe, when



she was younger. Much younger. Before I took matters in hand. Gisela was too soft. That sister of mine was a fine woman—she always did as she was told—but weak, my boy, weak. Consider the way she wept over that first husband of hers when the marriage was so abruptly...terminated.”

“She divorced him?” Hugo asked.

“Ah, yes.” Gundabald sounded uneasy. “To be sure, she divorced him because we told her to. She had no choice in the matter. Even then, everyone could see Charles’s mother becoming a power at court. There were many well-endowed suitors for Gisela’s hand. The second was a much better inarrriage and made us all wealthy.”

“Now all that’s gone,” Hugo said bitterly. “Between you and Gisela, if our coffers have a miserable copper in them we’re lucky. You wanted to rub shoulders with all the great magnates of the Frankish realm. To do that, you found out your shoulders had to be covered with velvet and brocade. And, yes, they wanted to be feasted. Worse than a horde of vultures, they swarmed over your household devouring everything in sight. And like vultures when the carcass was picked clean, they departed in a cloud of stink and were never seen again.

“Whatever they missed, Gisela laid her hands on, squandering it on relics, shrines, blessings, and pilgrimages, trying to lift the curse from that wretched brat of hers. You told me to get myself something younger. I’ve a good mind to pay that

cousin of mine a visit, by day of course, and—Father, you’re hurting me!” he screamed.

Gundabald’s reply was a snarl of fury. “You so much as touch that girl and I’ll save us both a lot of trouble and expense. I’ll slice off your prick and balls. You’ll be the smoothest eunuch between here and Constantinople. I swear it. She’s the one and only asset we have left and she *must* marry. Hear me!”

Hugo howled again. “Yes, yes, yes. You’re breaking my arm. Oh, God. Stop!”

Gundabald must have released him because Hugo’s shouting ceased. When he did speak, he sniveled. “Who would marry that...thing?”

Gundabald laughed. “I can name a dozen right now, who would kill to marry her. The most royal blood of Franca flows through her veins. Her father and mother both were cousins of the great king himself.”

“And those same ones who’d kill to marry her will run a sword through both you and I the moment they find out what she is.”

“I cannot think how I got such a son as you as the fruit of my loins,” Gundabald snarled. “But then your mother was a brainless little twit. Perhaps you take after her.”

Despite the sadistic nastiness of Gundabald’s voice, Hugo didn’t rise to the bait. Most of the people around Gundabald quickly learned to fear him. Hugo was no exception.

"You liked the way we lived well enough when we were in funds. Vultures, eh! That's the pot calling the kettle black. You fucked all night, fed all day, and drank with the rest of them. Now, you leave things you don't understand to your elders and betters. Shut up! And send for some food and wine—a lot of wine. I want my supper, and I want to forget what's behind that door in the next room."

"It was a mistake to bring her here," Hugo said. His voice was high and nervous. "She's worse than ever."

"Christ Jesus! God!" Gundabald roared. "Even a dumb animal has the sense to do what it's told. Dolt with the brains of a cobblestone! Shut up and at least get the wine. My God! I'm dying of thirst."

Marry, she thought listlessly. How could she marry? She didn't believe even a snake like Gundabald would connive at something so dangerous. Or succeed if he tried. Her mother still had a little land left in Franca, a few run-down villas. They generated only just enough money to feed and clothe the three of them. But nothing she was heir to would be enough to attract the attention of any of the great magnates of the Frankish realm.

As for her relationship to Charles—a king already beginning to be called the Great—it was a rather distant connection to his mother. The dear lady, Bertrada, had never even for one moment acknowledged Regeane's existence. In fact, one of the things that endeared Bertrada to King Peppin the Short was that she was followed

by a whole tribe of relations. They approached the court ready to swing their swords for church and king, not to mention the odd wagonload of loot that somehow managed not to fall into the king's treasury.

Regeane was very much lost in the crowd. She had nothing to offer. She was poor, a woman, and not beautiful. She didn't think there would be many takers for her hand in marriage. Yet if Gundabald could find some poor dope to swindle, she had no doubt he would auction her off without the slightest compunction and then leave her to fate. She just didn't think he would find anyone. Besides, Gundabald had, as they said, a hot throat and a cold prick. He wanted to cool the one and heat the other as frequently as possible. To indulge himself he needed what little money came in from her estates. He would certainly sell her, but not cheaply. It remained to be seen if he could get his price. At the moment, she couldn't bring herself to care much one way or the other.

Gisela's death had been the final blow. She had been Regeane's only protection against a world that would destroy her in an instant if it so much as guessed her secret—and against the worst excesses of Gundabald's greed. She had been Regeane's only confidante and companion. Regeane had no other friends, no other loves. She was now abandoned and utterly alone.

Dry-eyed, Regeane followed her mother's body to the grave. She was over-

THE SILVER WOLF

come by a despair so black it seemed to turn that bright day into night.

There is nothing left but moonlight, Regeane thought. Drink it, drown in it. She will never reproach me. I will never see her tears again or suffer because of them. Whatever may become of me, I am alone.

She stood, stripped off her dress and shift, and turned toward the silver haze.

The gust from the window was icy, but pleasure wouldn't exist without the sharp bite of pain. Even the brief flash of organ is too intense to be absolutely pleasurable.

Regeane was, as wolves go, a large wolf. She had the same weight as the girl, over a hundred pounds. She was much stronger than in her human state—lean, quick, and powerful. Her coat was smooth and thick. The pelt glowed silver as it caught the moonlight on its long guard hairs.

The wolf's heart overflowed with joy and gratitude. Regeane would never have admitted it in her human state, but she loved the wolf and, papal blessing or not, she would never let the wolf go.

From the bottom of her heart, she reveled in the change. Sometimes, while in her human state, she wondered who was wiser, she or the wolf. The wolf knew. Growing more beautiful and stronger year after year, the wolf waited for Regeane to be ready to receive her teaching and understand it.

The silver wolf lifted herself on her

hind legs and, placing her forepaws on the windowsill, peered out. She saw not just with her eyes as these maimed humans did, but with sensitive ears and nose.

The world humans saw was like a picture painted on a wall. To be believed in by the wolf, a thing had to have not only image, but smell, texture, and taste.

Ah God...how beautiful. The world was filled with wonder.

The rain must have come in the evening. The wolf could smell the damp, black earth under the green verdure as well as mud churned up by horse's hooves in a nearby lane.

The woman hadn't noticed it. She'd spent the day in grief-stricken reverie. For this she earned a brief flash of contempt from the wolf. But the wolf was too much a creature of the present to dwell on what was past. She was grateful for each moment. And this was a fine one.

Usually in Rome, the scent of man overpowered everything else. That effluvia of stale perspiration, raw sewage floating in the Tiber, the stench of human excrement which, even by comparison to that of other animals, is utterly vile. All these filled the air and pressed in around her. Overlaying them was the musty omnipresent evidence of human dwellings: stale wood smoke, damp timber, and stone.

But not tonight. The sharp wind blew from the open fields beyond the city, redolent of dry grass and the sweetness of wild herbs growing on the hillsides near the sea.



THE SILVER WOLF

Sometimes the fragrant breath from the Campagna carried the clean barnyard smells of pig and cattle, and faintly, the enticing musk of deer.

The night below was alive with movement. Cats made their homes among forgotten monuments. Here and there the slinking shape of a stray dog met her eye; occasionally, even furtive human movement. Thieves and footpads haunted the district, ready to prey on the unwary.

Her ears pricked forward and netted what her eyes could not see: the thump of a barn owl's wings in flight, the high, thin cries of bats swooping, darting, foraging for insects in the chill night air.

The rush and whisper of the hunters and the hunted, silent until the end. The agonized death cry of a bird, taken in sleep by a marauding cat, rent the air. The chopped-off shriek of a rabbit dying in the talons of an owl followed.

Those and many others were woven together by her wolf senses into a rich fabric that was unending variety and everlasting delight.

The silver wolf dropped her forepaws to the floor with a soft, nearly inaudible cry of longing. Then her lips curled back from her teeth in a snarl at the sound of voices in the other room.

Hugo and Gundabald were eating. The wolf's belly rumbled with hunger at the smell of roast meat. She was hungry and thirsty, longing for clean water and food.

The woman warned her night side to rein in her desires. She would get nothing.

The wolf replied. They were both gone—the woman from her prison, the wolf from her cage. The wolf stood beside a clear mountain lake. The full moon glowed silver in the water. All around the lake, black trees were silhouetted against mountains glittering white with unending snow.

The memory faded. The wolf and woman found themselves staring at the locked door.

The wolf and woman both understood imprisonment. Regeane had spent most of her life behind locked doors. She'd long ago learned the punishing futility of assaults on oak and iron. She ignored what she couldn't change and bided her time.

They were speaking of her.

"Did you hear that?" Hugo asked fearfully. Hugo's ears were better than Gundabald's. He must have heard her soft cry of protest.

"No," Gundabald mumbled through a mouthful of food. "I didn't and you didn't either. You only imagined you did. She seldom makes any noise. That's one thing we can be grateful for. At least she doesn't spend her nights howling as a real wolf would."

"We shouldn't have brought her here," Hugo moaned.

"Must you start that again?" Gundabald sighed wearily.

"It's true," Hugo replied with drunken insistence. "The founders of this city were suckled at the tits of a mother



THE SILVER WOLF

wolf. Once they called themselves sons of the wolf. Ever since I found out about her I've often thought of that story. A real wolf couldn't raise human children, but a creature like her..."

Gundabald laughed raucously. "A fairy tale made up by some strumpet to explain a clutch of bastard brats. She wouldn't be the first or won't be the last to spin a wild story to cover her own."

"You won't listen to anything," Hugo said petulantly. "She's gotten worse since we came here. Even while her own mother was dying, she..."

The silver wolf's lips drew back. Her teeth gleamed in the moonlight like ivory knives. Even in the wolf's heart, Hugo's words rankled.

Pointless the smoldering anger. Pointless the brief, sad rebellion. The door stood between her tormentors. The barred window between the magnificent creature and freedom.

She began to pace as any caged beast will, obeying the wordless command: Stay strong. Stay healthy. Stay alert. Fear not, time will come.





**ALICE
BORCHARDT**

shared a childhood of
storytelling with her
sister, Anne Rice,
in New Orleans.
A professional nurse,
she has also nurtured a
profound interest in
little-known periods
of history. She published
her debut novel,
Devoted, in 1995.
She lives in Houston.



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The stepmother spit where the Nana had stood, and made the signs against the evil eye.

"Sneak behind my back to your mother's friends, will you! Work, you fetish bitch, work, work, work!" she shrieked, striking Olaide in the face. "None of you heathen females knows the meaning of hard work! None of you knows the pain that turns even pleasure into a task of work. Dance! Only men and witches dance, but I shall cut the man-witch parts right out of this little humming bird," she sneered.

All that day the stepmother and her daughters ran Olaide back and forth, up and down, slapping, kicking, and tripping her in an extraordinary rage. Their fury worked them so hard in fact, that they exhausted themselves, and their bowels became disrupted. They chained her before sundown in order that they could rest and tend their guts. The stepsisters stumbled all the way to the slave wall, but the storm in their bellies sent them running for the necessary before they turned the key in the locks.

Olaide knew what to do. She twined dried grass into the links of her shackles to silence the chains. She shuffled to the garden and snapped the sweetest and most perfectly shaped pumpkins from the vines. Pumpkin was the favorite food of all the Ezilies, Doba no less than the others. Joyfully, by the light of the full Moon, Olaide prepared the pumpkins in all the most delicious forms she knew. Although she was very, very hungry herself, she took not so much as a taste with the tip of a forefinger, except, when she must, to gauge the perfection of her cooking.

When she finished with the pumpkins, she swept clean and sprinkled with water a place of sacrifice between Tree and the altar hut. To the space, she carried a calabash of cornmeal she'd ground that morning. She sang softly the songs that praised Doba and all her family parts while the fingers of one hand tricked Doba's own lines and figures on the ground with cornmeal. She killed a white hen, which she placed in the center. A bowl of pumpkin soup, a plate of pumpkin fritters, a dish of fried pumpkin mashed with spices and sugar, and a platter of toasted pumpkin cakes were displayed as beautifully as Olaide could manage. She decorated the dishes with yellow and white flowers. She added a jar of honey, for all the Ezilies are very very fond of honey. Then she danced in front of the altar, singing to Doba. Her hands and her feet created the particular rhythms that summoned Foddin Ezilie from the invisible realm to the visible world.

She danced, and she danced, and she danced.

Olaide danced until she was no longer dancing alone. The Nana, with Ezilie Doba seated in her head, danced with her. The Nana's fly whisk touched the girl's shackles, and they fell from her ankles. The Nana's fly whisk touched the girl's slave collar and it snapped open. They danced through Beija-Flor's gates with only the Moon to see. A handsome Benz waited in the car park outside the compound walls. The Nana, who was now nearly entirely the Nana, a Very Big Woman of the City, and not much Doba any longer, opened the back door. Eager hands belonging to members of her mother's age-set grasped the girl gently and pulled her inside. The Nana drove at speed around all the curves that Olaide used to gallop in her happier days, to her own mansion in the Heights.

There, to the mournful cries of her mother's friends, the girl was fed, bathed, and dressed.

And oh-la-la, how she was dressed! The clothes were of the highest quality Togolese textiles that Nana sold, made into a Brazilian costume-gown from the Old Days. The upper part of the bodice was worked muslin with a broad lace jabot that reached from neck to waist. The full circular skirt was white with arabesques of yellow. A silk shawl of yellow and white stripes hid her right shoulder and was pinned with an ancient gold brooch, fashioned in the days shortly after the Portuguese first sailed the Gulf. The Nana added gold necklaces and bracelets before wrapping Olaide's elaborately braided coiffure in a large head tie of white net.

Best, best of all, were a pair of the smoothest, thinnest, flat-heeled white leather boots, with bewitching tassels of yellow on the vamps.

In the Benz, on the way to the Market ground, Olaide spoke of Baby Sister's death at the hands of the stepmother, and also of the

now seeming suspiciously sudden death of her father in the evil north wing, and the marriage into which she was to be forced once her womanly parts were cut out.

Although her mother's friends were outraged by all these things, it was the cutting that most infuriated them. "Sacrilege against the Ezilie family in whole and against the family in parts. Always, always she-they honor and protect above all things a woman's private parts, for they are the manifestation of themselves here in the visible world! She will punish that wicked woman and her wicked family. But for now, see, here are all your school friends, your age-set, and the members of our Societies' auxiliaries. They have all missed you so much these last moons. Like we seniors, they too sacrificed to the *foddices* and the Ancestors for aid in helping you."

Oh, it was so happy to be in the Market, among her friends and those of her mother! The drums beat, voices sang, the languages of her city danced in the porches of her ears — Yoruba, Portuguese, Fon, French, Dendi, English, Bariba. The *yovos* — white people — from America mingled easily with the people of the city instead of remaining aloof in their judges' pavilion. She roamed about the food vendors' stalls arm-in-arm with her dearest friends. They admired each other's costumes, while all agreed that Olaide's was the finest of them all, just as she was the most beautiful of them all.

"Ezilie Doba has mounted you, it must be. How else can one as young as we are, be as fetching as you are tonight?" her friends declared. "See how the *yovo* judges' eyes are already on you! And as for the boys' eyes, whether they are dancing or not — oh-la-la!"

When the Moon was past the center of the heavens, it was time for them to dance. Olaide took her accustomed place at the head of the group. At the signal of the drums, she led them out to the center of the ground right before the judges' pavilion. Then, it was true. Foddin Ezilie, in her most spritely, young form, seated herself in Olaide's head, and the girl danced like no one had ever seen a girl dance before. She leaped so high that her fingers caught the stars and brought them back to Earth. She leaped so high that her hand carressed the cheeks of the Moon. Her ability inspired all those who danced with her, though they were able to leap only high enough to grasp the clouds that contained the lunar glow. There was no doubt, when the Moon had moved into the last quadrant of Heaven, that Olaide and her group would be chosen by the Americans to tour their vast, mysterious land with the *Fête des Africains*. That night of Olaide's American exhibition was to be told and retold among the women's Secret Societies forever.

As for that wicked woman and her daughters, a sorcerer learned that they had poisoned Olaide's father, and that Baby Sister's body had been buried under the Spirit Tree. The authorities executed them and gave their bodies to the crocodiles. As for the stepmother's evil brother and his attendants, they also were eaten by crocodiles for they had gotten drunk and fallen into the swamp on the other side of the lagoon.

Olaide, however, after the *Fête des Africains* concluded, stayed in America where she attended Harvard School of Business and Harvard Law School. But as soon as she could do so, she returned to our city and her beloved Beija-Flor. She took up the reins of her family's business, married, and had many beautiful daughters, who also leaped higher and danced more beautifully than everyone else.

"AND THEN," WE SHOUTED ALL TOGETHER, "OUR MOTHERS GOT married, Headed a business, and had us, and we can jump higher than everyone else too! Soon, it will be our turn to be the Heads."

Our YaYa sucked her teeth. "I do not know about that my dears. You girls are not nearly as good girls as Olaide was. I don't know that the *foddices* and the Ancestors will want to help and protect such forgetful, lazy, greedy, and disrespectful girls."

We cut looks at each other out of the corners of our eyes.

In turn, each of us hugged our YaYa before announcing we were going to pay our respects to the Gods and Ancestors in the courtyard of Beija-Flor. This pleased her very much, we could tell.

We had to please her. Otherwise she'd never tell us another story! ■



When you're twelve, little things take on big meanings. So sometimes you have to look even closer to find the truth.

AND NOW ABIDETH THESE THREE

BY SHERWOOD SMITH

Illustration by Steven Adler

CYNTHIA LEANED HER FOREHEAD AGAINST the cool window glass, watching the traffic inch forward in Mother-May-I steps on the street below. It was time to leave, and she was a little excited, but mostly afraid.

Downstairs her mother yelled, "Cynthia! Are you ready?"

Cynthia opened her door and her mother charged in, heels clacking. "We've got to run, we'll be late! Now let me see you."

Cynthia obediently turned around. The outfit was brand new, bought for this birthday party, exactly the same label the other girls were all wearing. It had taken her mother two weeks to find an outlet selling seconds at discount. They couldn't find the flaw in the blouse, or the skirt.

Cynthia and her mother got into the brand-new Sentra her mother had borrowed. "Your present is on the back seat, Cynthia."

"It's not jewelry, is it?" Cynthia asked.

"No." A quick, suspicious look. "You said they aren't giving jewelry any more."

Cynthia tried to sound careless. "It's totally tacky. Only boys can give a girl jewelry, now that we're in middle school. Boys or relatives."

Her mother never argued with school pronouncements of what was, or wasn't, tacky. "No jewelry, no hair things, no school things ... it's getting harder to find something they'll like." She sighed, rattling her bracelets.

They don't like *anything* I give them, Cynthia thought, but of course she didn't say it out loud. Her mother went to some expensive store to ask the

snippy sales ladies what well-to-do preteens were buying in this or that item, and then shopped tirelessly for hours to find the same thing, or nearly the same, for a decent price. Then she used boxes from the best stores, carefully hoarded, and expensive wrapping paper, only used for the school birthday parties.

And no matter what Cynthia gave any of them, she never saw it again.

As they neared Beverly Hills she felt her stomach tighten. She'd managed to skip three parties so far this year with sickness excuses, but there was a reason she didn't want to skip Wallace von Diefenburgh's party. The reason was in the garden. She could ignore the girls if the garden, and the pond, were still there.

Cynthia shut her eyes against the Sun glaring through the wind-shield, thinking about the pond behind Wallace's mansion, and how important it was to see it again. If it wasn't there ... Well, she thought, if it isn't there at least the Christmas lights will be on, and I can take off my glasses and the lights will be pretty snowflake shapes. Pretend magic is better than nothing.

Her mother said, "You know, it's not too soon to talk about *your* birthday. March is right around the corner."

Fear burned in Cynthia's middle. "Dad wants me again this year." "Again?"

Her mother slammed her hand flat on the steering wheel, being careful not to ruin one of her long, painted nails. She always dressed up before the parties, just in case a mother came out to ask her if she wanted some coffee. They did, sometimes, to each other, but never to her.

"Talk him out of it, OK?" she said. "Tell him how important it is to your future. You have to socialize with these girls, and that means entertain them. Take your turn. We'll rent a good place at a decent address. Get it all catered."

"I'll try," Cynthia said, but it made her angry to lie even that much. Instead, she'd make sure her dad would take her the whole week-end of her birthday, even though she'd have to spend it all babysitting her little half-brothers as part of the deal.

Anything was better than a repeat of her own party in third grade, her second year at that school. Cynthia hated to remember it, but it always came back to her mind, like a bruise that would never go away. Of course they didn't have the party at her apartment on crowded, noisy La Brea, because the other girls all had nice homes in Beverly Hills, Brentwood, or Malibu. Her mother had rented an ice cream parlor. Cynthia had to sit there at the head of the long table set for 12, wearing a Sleeping Beauty crown with fake jewels, and watch the two girls who came poke at their cake and exchange looks and giggles of embarrassment.

"They don't like me," Cynthia had cried when she got home.

Her mother said firmly, "What have you done to make them dislike you?"

"Nothing! Nothing! But I'm different."

"No you aren't. You all wear the same uniforms, and if you don't tell them where you live, no one will know you're not from Beverly or Malibu or the Palisades."

"But they do know," she'd cried.

"Here we are," her mother said, breaking into the bad memories.

Long green lawns and beautiful landscaping rolled back from the quiet street. "It'll be worth all the sacrifice, when you live in a place like this," her mother said, slowing down as she looked at the mansions barely visible behind trees and ironwrought fences.

Cynthia's hand rose to her mouth, unnoticed until her mother slapped it down without looking. "No biting! Pretty nails are a sign of a girl with poise and breeding."

Cynthia twisted her hands in her lap as the car rolled slowly up the last hill. The really big mansions were on the hill. You couldn't see any of them from the street.

Cynthia looked out the car window, thinking of the things she didn't tell her mother. How Barbara Sullivan bit her nails right down to the nubs. How Tricia Hererra threw up in bathrooms after she ate, just so she'd stay skinny, and her breath always smelled like vomit. How the girls in the group had secret nicknames for each other, and mean names for everyone else — how Cynthia was called Synthetica, but never to her face.

"Here's the von Diefenburgh girl's place." And her mother began the ritual: "Remember your manners, child."

"Yes, Mom. Please and thank you, no seconds, smile, don't laugh with my mouth open, sit with my legs together, leave the bathroom as clean as I found it."

"And if anyone invites you somewhere after, you call. I'll say yes, but I have to know, so I can borrow the car longer."

Cynthia took the present, thinking of Wallace's friends up there already, with their sleeping bags for the sleep-over. She hadn't told her mother — and wouldn't — that it was a school rule that the girls in every class had to invite the whole class to birthday parties, but only the friends stayed for sleep-overs afterward.

"Have a good time. And smile," her mother said, her eyes searching the driveway — hoping someone would appear and wave her in. Cynthia thought as she carefully closed the door to the borrowed car. Her mother's voice came faintly: "Remember! To make a friend, be a friend!"

Cynthia started slowly up the driveway. For just a moment, she had this wild idea of throwing the stupid present into a trash can and sneaking to the fence and climbing over. She could stay in the garden all afternoon, and watch the pond — if it was still there.

But she had to call her mother to pick her up, and then she'd have to make up a million lies about the party. Her mother loved to talk about the parties all the long drive back to their apartment, hearing about every detail.

She topped the hill and pressed the buzzer on the gate. A light flashed, and then another buzz sounded. Cynthia pulled the heavy door open, and walked up to the house.

A maid in a uniform waited in the big vestibule. She looked Cynthia over from her hair to her shoes, then said with a pronounced French accent as she pointed, "Ze party's back dair."

"Thank you," Cynthia said, though the woman had already turned away.

Cynthia was used to the maids. If they didn't already know your name, they didn't bother learning it. They knew right away you weren't one of the girl's real friends, just a classmate for the birthday party.

Cynthia walked slowly through three huge rooms, looking at the antique furniture, the grand piano, the giant mirror, the indoor plants. The tile under her feet was different from last time. They had redecorated again. Had they redone the garden as well? Fear made her stomach clump.

She stepped down into the conservatory, and put her present on the side table with other gifts.

A fat girl in a very expensive party dress stood at the window.

When she heard Cynthia's steps she looked up, her expression changing from hope to disappointment. Then, just as quick, she smiled a fake smile. "Cynthia!"

"Hi."

Courtney Nabor acted glad to see her, but that was only because she was alone. That meant the maid had also said to her, "Ze party's

back dair," instead of greeting her by name and sending her up to Wallace's room.

Courtney fingered her hair then carefully tossed it back. Cynthia realized it had been cut and styled since she'd seen Courtney last at school, and she wondered if she was supposed to say something about it. Except she'd learned never to say anything about people's appearances — if you weren't popular, no matter what you said was wrong.

"Cody's still upstairs getting ready," Courtney said with another hair toss, and then giggled.

Cynthia nodded and smiled, though she was sure that Courtney could hear as well as she could the shrieks of laughter echoing down the marble stairs from above. Wishing that Courtney would move away from the window, she wandered over to the table to inspect the decorations for later description to her mother.

Courtney said, still fiddling with her hair, "Everybody stayed up late last night, working on that stupid statistics thing for Social Studies."

Cynthia nodded again, guessing that some of the girls upstairs had already spent one night, and Courtney had found out by calling on some pretext or other.

"Cody says that Maddy will probably be here, if she doesn't have jetlag too bad," Courtney added, giggling again.

Cynthia was surprised. Madeleine Devereux, the richest girl in the school, almost never came to the birthday parties. In fact, half the time she wasn't even at school — she flew around the world a lot, and had a private tutor to keep her up with her grade.

CODY SAYS— Courtney turned quickly toward the door, but the newcomer was only a servant, who put a big chunk of dry ice in the punch.

That's the third "Cody", Cynthia thought, knowing that Courtney wouldn't dare use the nickname to Wallace's face. Sometimes Wallace permitted would-be followers to use the nicknames, but often she'd make her eyes big and say, "You talkin' to me?" while all her pals laughed.

Cynthia never used any names, never addressed anyone first. As Courtney wandered over to the table and started picking at the chips and dip, Cynthia wondered if she knew that Wallace's gang called her *Whale Nabor* behind her back.

Now that Courtney was busy with the food, Cynthia went to the window and looked out. There was the garden — it had not been changed, at least. She saw a hatted head bobbing close to the pond. Digging. A gardener? As soon as the gardener, or she, left, Cynthia would escape out there.

Clattering and thumping and high-pitched giggles preceded the arrival of Wallace and her shadow Barbara Sullivan, and their five satellites. They were all in shades of blue. Courtney started cooing and cawing over how cool Wallace looked, and how cute her hair was. Wallace grinned and flounced to the head of the table. "Books isn't coming?" she asked, looking around, her blue eyes lighting on Cynthia and moving past.

Cynthia shrugged, but Courtney hurried in, her voice gossipy and eager. "She said she won't come. Neither are her three musketeers. Boo — she said they'd rather be at the libe all day." She giggled.

Wallace and her gang snickered too. Taylor Tomlinson-Ferguson, nicknamed Books, was Wallace's rival in the classroom. Taylor cared passionately about grades, and Wallace ignored them. Cynthia didn't see any difference between the girls for meanness.

Cynthia wondered what Courtney had said about Wallace to Taylor in order to get that gossip. As if Wallace was thinking the same thing, she said, "Well, Maddy will be here any time. Send her upstairs, OK?"

The gang ran out again, the giggles giving way to screams of laughter.

Courtney's face was pale except for two red spots. Cynthia turned away quickly, pretending not to notice — pretending it was just a request, and not a horrible putdown. But it was a putdown, and Cynthia saw in Courtney's stiff smile that she knew it. They were not welcome upstairs, but Maddy was. Of course the maid would catch Madeleine at the door so they would never even get the chance to tell her anything, but the hint — I don't want you — was there.

Courtney still grinned, but her eyes looked sick. It was those eyes that made Cynthia brave enough to speak first. "I'd like to look at the garden until they come back."

Courtney could be as mean as Wallace or Taylor, but she only seemed to do it when the leaders were there to approve. Now she giggled and said, "Why not? It's stuffy in here."

The hazy sunshine carried scents from the flowers, all nodding bright heads in the breeze. Courtney headed straight for the pond. Cynthia followed, her heart racing. Before, she had gone to the pond both times alone, once on a sunny warm day like this, and once when it was drizzling.

"Did you know that her grandmother owns this place?" Courtney said.

Cynthia shook her head, noticing the lack of "Cody"

"Her dad's been fired from two places. Not like they need the money, with this house to live in," Courtney went on. "Did you know it's practically the oldest house in Beverly Hills? But Wallace's parents don't own it, though they talk like they do. It belongs to Wallace's grandmother. Her name is Mathilde Oslossen. Mathilde! Oslossen! What dorky names! We don't know where they got their money."

They were very near the little bridge. The broad hat moving among the shrubs indicated the gardener still at work. As the girls reached the bridge, the hat lifted, revealing an old, seamed face. Two bird-bright eyes studied them, and then the gardener smiled.

Cynthia smiled back. Courtney looked away, tossing her hair. "Ugh," she said. "That gross algae! You'd think they could clear this pool out."

Cynthia looked down, holding her breath in case the figures were gone, that she had imagined them after all. Courtney certainly saw nothing. But when she stared down into the cool green water, she saw the delicate fronds wavering up toward the surface, and dancing between them were the fairies. Cynthia leaned against the bridge rail, watching.

As delicate as figures on etched glass, the graceful little sprites swooped and whirled in the water, eyes slanting and laughter bubbles rising from open mouths. A bird divebombed the water, and the figures darted away, then regathered, swimming in dizzying circles. Along the sides of the water, tiny houses made of sand and bright pebbles and moss were cleverly hidden among the ferns. Trails no wider than a finger's breadth wound up and down little mounds, disappearing into tiny tunnels under sheltering fronds.

Cynthia drew in a deep breath. How could Wallace's family live here and not want to spend all their time at this pond?

"Watch how many times I can skip," Courtney said, picking up a pebble. She cocked her wrist back.

"Oh, don't!" Cynthia yelled.

Courtney gaped, almost dropping the stone.

"Don't you ... see ... them?" Cynthia asked, pointing at the pond. Courtney came back up on the bridge, and wrinkled her nose. "Some kind of silver fish. So what?"

"The algae," Cynthia said quickly. "It'll stink if you stir it up."

"Ugh," Courtney said. "Disgusting." She dropped her stone and wandered back down the bridge toward the house.

Cynthia lingered, unwilling to leave the fascinating creatures unless she had to. So she was startled when a husky voice said right next to her, "Do you see them?"

She whirled around, found the old gardener standing there. "See what?" she asked cautiously.

"Them." A gnarled hand pointed down at the dancing figures. Rainbow patterns shifted across the water as they swam upward, touched the surface, then dove down.

"The fairies?"

The gardener cackled in delight. "You do see them?" "I've seen them three times now," Cynthia breathed. "But — you mean everybody doesn't see them?"

The gardener pointed her trowel. "Your friend didn't, did she?" "You mean Courtney? No, I guess she didn't."

The old woman laughed, then squinted up at Cynthia, her bright blue eyes and cocked head sparrowlike. "Who are you?" she asked. "One of the girls here for my granddaughter's party?"

Cynthia blinked at the old woman in the rough clothes and ratty hat, trying to equate her with the formidable image of a white-haired lady in diamonds and black lace, with a cruel face like Wallace's, but old.

"You must go to that school, then." The grandmother nodded. "Yes."

"Never seen you around."

Not sure how to interpret this, Cynthia said defensively, "I've been here for two of Wallace's other birthday parties. That's when I saw them." She pointed at the pond. "I thought Wallace knew about them, but just didn't care."

"She hasn't seen them. At least, she couldn't when she was small. Now neither the kid nor those shrieking brats come out here," the grandmother said, still eyeing Cynthia. Then she grunted softly. "Tell me. What's she like at school?"

The blue eyes were steady. Cynthia formed a polite lie in her mind, but when she opened her lips, out came the word "Mean."

Mrs. Oslossen pursed her lips. "Thought so." Her tone was matter-of-fact, but Cynthia could tell in the way the old woman's gaze went aside and then down that she felt badly.

Cynthia mumbled, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't —"

"Never mind," Mrs. Oslossen said.

For a time they stood there on the bridge, watching the fairies in their continual whirl of activity below the surface of the glinting water. Silver fish swam slowly among them, unnoticed, unnoticing.

"Which girl are you?" the old lady asked presently.

Cynthia hesitated. The way the question was phrased indicated that Mrs. Oslossen already knew the names of the girls in Wallace's class. Cynthia thought about how Wallace probably talked about her classmates, if she mentioned them at all, and she said, "They call me Synthetica." She was glad her voice sounded as matter-of-fact as Wallace's grandmother had sounded after Cynthia called the granddaughter mean.

Mrs. Oslossen nodded, her eyes steady but kind. "It seems the only sin you've committed is pretending to be wealthy."

Cynthia shook her head, but stayed silent.

She thought of Open House, the one night a year her mother came to school, and how she'd go from group to group of the adults with her big smile, talking loudly about the film industry, and trips to New York and London, new cars, and high-fashion-label clothes. None of it was outright lies — Cynthia's father *did* work in the film industry, but he was just a sound editor, and Cynthia's mother did arrange trips to New York and London, but for other people at the travel agency where she worked, and she certainly knew all about expensive cars and clothes. But everything was exaggerated to make it seem bigger and nicer and richer and more important.

"Ah," the old lady said. "Yours must be the Stella Dallas mother."

Cynthia's lips parted. She was about to say that her mother was Toni Deal, then she realized that adults would have their own nicknames. Her face and neck went hot.

The old lady patted her arm with her brown, knuckly fingers. "A strange world we live in, child," she said. Her voice was warm with sympathy and humor. She held out her gnarled hand and gripped Cynthia's. "I am Tilda Oslossen. Tell me your *real* name."

"Cynthia Deal. Have — have the fairies always been here?"

"Near as I know," Mrs. Oslossen said. "My grandfather built this place, long before it was fashionable. He planned the house around

this pond. My sister and I both saw the fairies. My grandmother didn't, nor my parents or either of my brothers. My grandfather did all the gardening, and when he died it was I who inherited the place. Now I do the gardening. I can't risk having some blind fellow trample one of the houses, or kill a family with his big boot." She bent and plucked a pale pink petal from a rose, and dropped it. The petal drifted down, landed on the water, and tiny fairy children darted up and swam round and round it.

What will happen after she's gone? Cynthia thought. She stole a look sideways. The old lady's lips were pursed as she watched the fairies in the water. She's thinking the same thing, Cynthia realized.

"My sister died young," the old lady said. "Influenza epidemic."

"I'm sorry," Cynthia whispered.

"So am I — still. It was her idea to travel over the world and try to find more places like this. We couldn't believe it was the only one in the world. After she died, I lost interest. Maybe this is the only one, and not everyone can see it. Do you think it is?"

Cynthia shook her head. "I don't know," she said, then added in a burst, "I don't want it to be. I want there to be lots and lots of them, and I want to find one that —" She stopped.

"That's yours," Mrs. Oslossen finished, her smile turning wry. "I work every day to keep their surroundings congenial, but most of them don't see me any more than my family sees them. A couple of them do, I think. Sometimes I kneel on the edge, right over there where the flat rock is, and there are three or four tiny faces just below the surface, round and sweet as flowers, looking up at me. Like little children with their faces pressed against glass." She plucked another rose, and tossed the petals down. "You can't own them, any more than you can own your children. The most you can do is try to keep them safe, but it takes constant vigilance. And when we're gone —"

A shriek from the house made her turn suddenly. In the big window they saw only Courtney, standing at the refreshment table, eating. More shrieks and laughter echoed down. "Mad-dy! Mad-dy!"

"Feel free to come back down after the ritual is over," the old lady said, and Cynthia realized it was time to go to the party.

Reluctantly she walked back up to the house. Inside, Cynthia found the girls all circling around Madeleine, their chatter and giggles punctuated with shrieks of admiration. Madeleine stood still, looking blank — she was used to being the center of attention whenever she reappeared in their lives. Cynthia saw that she was still as skinny and plain as ever, and her hair was still long, Cynthia envied that hair. She wanted long hair, but her mother made her cut hers in styles like the other girls wore.



WALLACE OOHED AND ahhed loudest over Madeleine's clothes and hair, though her smile looked fake and her giggles were the high, sharp kind that hurt your ears after a while. Above her grin her eyes flicked back and forth between the other girls, and Cynthia realized that Wallace was annoyed at not being the center of attention at her own party, but of course on Monday every time Wallace opened her mouth her words would begin "Maddy says —" Especially

if Madeleine wasn't there. Taylor would be furious, because Madeleine hadn't come to her last party even though she'd definitely been in the country.

Finally the maid appeared in the doorway, and Wallace shrieked, "We have to go into the dining room now! Come on, let's get it over with!" She gave a loud, fake sigh — followed by louder giggles than anyone else's.

Madeleine turned with the rest, and said, "I'm hungry. Is this a lunch thing, Wallace?"

Wallace tossed her blonde hair. "Just sandwich stuff, but I can get you anything you want. Oh no!" she shrieked, stopping with dramatic suddenness and staring at the potato chip bowl. "Who oinked all the chips?"

The mound of potato chips was slightly dented on one side, but Courtney Nabor cringed as if she really had eaten them all. Barbara turned and glared at her, hands on her hips, followed by Stephanie and Tricia. Cynthia saw all seven girls snake looks at Madeleine to see how she reacted.

Madeleine walked right past as if Wallace hadn't spoken, bent over the table and piled chips onto a plate.

"Sit here, Maddy!" Wallace pulled out the chair next to her seat. Barbara tried to look unconcerned as she quickly moved her Coke.

But Madeleine had already taken a seat in the middle of the table. She bit into a sandwich and didn't seem to notice as the other girls quickly reorganized themselves so that Wallace and Barbara were sitting on either side of Madeleine. Tricia and Stephanie pushed past Cynthia and Courtney so they could sit across from Madeleine, and the rest took chairs at either side of them.

You can change a place, but you can't change the order of things, Cynthia thought as she sat in Wallace's old place. Courtney went to the other end, tossing her hair and giggling obediently at everything Wallace said.

The maid came back in with more food, and spoke in a low voice to Madeleine, who looked up and smiled. Cynthia realized it was the first smile she'd seen from Madeleine — that Madeleine had spoken to the others with exactly the same sort of blank expression that Cynthia knew she wore herself.

Now Madeleine spoke in rapid French with the maid, who smiled back. The other girls watched in sudden silence; though they all took French at school, nobody could speak it like that.

The maid went away, and Wallace and Barbara started chattering about France, and Europe, and the talk slowly made its way to school gossip as the girls vied for Madeleine's attention, while Madeleine sat there and chomped steadily through her plate of food.

The maid brought her a crock of soup, and once again there was silence but Madeleine just said "Merci," and so the party went on.

After the cake, when they got up to go into the conservatory for the presents, Madeleine said, "Oh, Wallace, I didn't bring anything — we just got home yesterday. I'll have something on Monday."

"Oooh, I can hardly wait," Wallace gushed. "I know I'll love it!"

Cynthia thought about how Madeleine would tell some servant on the way home that she needed a present for Monday, and the servant would take care of it — maybe even deliver it. She thought about the weeks her mother had spent in trying to find what was just right, and then the hassle of finding something she could afford, and getting it wrapped right, and all along she knew that whatever it was, Wallace would hate it. She felt a surge of hatred for Madeleine.

She's plain and skinny and brown, just like me, Cynthia thought. Just because she's rich, everybody thinks she's perfect.

Cynthia picked a seat by the window, as far from the other girls as she could. She couldn't quite see the pond, but it was comforting to know it was there, and strange to think about the fairies being a secret even from Wallace, who lived right with them.

"Excuse me," Madeleine said. "Bathroom call."

Wallace and the rest giggled — of course — and as soon as Madeleine was out of the room, Wallace said, "I'll just get started. We'll save the cool ones for when Maddy gets back."

Cynthia's present was the first one she picked up. Usually it was one of the last. Cynthia stayed where she was, and listened to the rustle of paper, and the voices of the girls. Crows, that's what they sounded like. The giggles were more like machine guns, little machine guns that shot invisible needles instead of bullets. Wallace croaked in her phoniest voice, "Oh, thank you so very much, Cynthia. How very nice."

Cynthia stayed by the window. She didn't even know what the present was, and didn't want to. Not seeing it somehow made it less real, less a part of her, and Wallace's invisible needles dissolved in the air before they reached her. The other girls looked at her, then looked away again, as Wallace picked up Courtney Nabor's gift.

I'm free, Cynthia realized. They'll never notice me again.

She slid off her seat and walked to the door as the machine guns tittered away at the grinning Courtney. Outside, the air smelled

sweet and fresh, and Cynthia ran happily down toward the bridge — and then stopped when she saw a scrawny figure crouching on the flat rock next to the pond.

Madeleine looked up at Cynthia. She pointed at the pond and said, "Come here, and tell me what you see."

Cynthia didn't move for a long breath. Two breaths. Why? She thought, angrier than she'd ever been in all the years she'd had to sit alone at that school and pretend not to notice the insults she didn't deserve, while the lucky ones like Madeleine got all the admiration they didn't deserve. Why did Madeleine have to see the fairies too? Why couldn't Cynthia have one thing, just one, that the rich girl couldn't?

Maybe I can take it away from her, Cynthia thought, and stalked forward. Her teeth felt cold — she realized she was grinning, a big fake grin just like Barbara and Wallace and all the others. "See what?" she said, and her head jiggled as giggles machine-gunned out. As if she had practiced all her life. "Oh! You mean the holograms. It's a garden fashion. Didn't you know? So easy, when you know people in the industry. You didn't think those were real?" Her voice sounded just like Wallace's, and the lie came out as if she'd practiced it, except her stomach hurt.

Madeleine's mouth went round.

Cynthia giggled louder, gasping giggles that made her shake all over. "It's fake! Totally fake! Fake, fake, fake!"

Madeleine's eyes narrowed like she'd been slapped — like she really felt those invisible needles. Hunching over, she stared down at the pond, her skinny body so still she had to be holding her breath.

Were the fairies gone? Cynthia wondered then if her lie might make them disappear forever — either that or she wouldn't see them, as a kind of punishment. She ran to the bridge and scanned the water, breathing fast.

The fairies were still there, swimming in their mesmerizing circles. Cynthia's stomach unclenched slowly as she watched tiny fairy children playing some kind of game under the rose petals still floating over the gently rippling surface. Then she looked up, and saw Madeleine watching her.

Cynthia stared back. The giggles had dried up, and so had the lies. She couldn't think of anything to say, except, "They're waiting for you at the party."

One of Madeleine's bony shoulders rose sharply in a shrug. "No projectors," she said.

"What?" Cynthia's brain felt like a rock.

Madeleine's brown eyes were blank as marbles. "No projectors. You can't have holograms — or movies, or anything else — without a projector. There isn't one here."

Cynthia felt heat rush up into her face, and her armpits pricked.

"You do see them," Madeleine said. "Nobody else does — I made sure of that last time Wallace had me over. Why did you lie about them being real?"

Cynthia looked down at Madeleine's face, and saw it as a face. She saw those waiting brown eyes, and the skinny chin, the freckles on her nose, the plain brown hair in the single long ponytail down her back. Madeleine never giggled, never lied. She didn't have to.

"Because you're rich," Cynthia said. "You already have everything in the world. I — I didn't want you to have this too." Her face felt hotter than ever, but her stomach didn't feel as nasty as it had when she told the lies. "Anyway, Wallace's grandmother sees them too." Cynthia looked around quickly, hoping Mrs. Oslossen hadn't heard her

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When all this started, it was during the Darlov regime, and I was working in the mailroom at Stupendous Entertainment, which is this monstrous medieval-looking faux castle in the hills, overlooking the Hollywood Freeway. I had ambitions, but I kept them to myself. I had an agent, Bobby Detweiler, but he was about as much an agent as I was a writer; he was an archnerd.

*We all know Hollywood is the land where fairy tales come true.
We just never took it quite so seriously...*

DR. RUMPOLE

BY S.P. SOMETOW
Illustration by David Beck

worked in the computer room at Sullivan-Lechner, and moonlighted as a production assistant.

That Bobby Detweiler, Elena Darlov, and I would end up in the same stuck freight elevator in a soundstage in Valencia was the kind of coincidence you might find in a Victorian novel. The aftermath of that meeting, on the other hand, was the fabric of fairy tale.

The movie was *Encino Exorcist*. Bobby was going upstairs to try to sober up the star. I had dropped in to see Bobby, and volunteered to carry the mug of espresso on the off-chance I could wangle Brad's autograph. We took the freight elevator because I didn't want to spill the coffee running up the stairs. One floor to go, and the door slides open to reveal Elena Darlov.

"Fuck this script," she said, waving a jelly-stained sheaf of papers in my face. "It's the worst piece of shit I've ever seen in my life. If I can't get a page one rewrite by tomorrow, Brad's gonna walk."

Opportunity knocks but once, and Bobby sprang into action.

"Elena," he said, "Bobby Detweiler with Sullivan-Lechner. Ran into you at Cannes, Jeff's party, remember? Boy, you sure have lucked out. We have just signed the hottest new writer. Name's Adam Villacin. Wild imagination. Scintillating dialogue. Give the man 24 hours, and he could turn your pile of shit into a mountain of gold."

Elena looked pained. "I wasn't at Jeff's party," she said. "You shouldn't believe everything you read in *Variety*."

An awkward silence was averted when the elevator sort of wheezed to a stop between floors. I picked up the red phone and called for help. Bobby went on talking up a storm. He raved about my spec script, which had just bounced back from Dreamworks unopened. About scripts I hadn't even written. About an idea I'd once almost pitched to Roger the time I found myself in the next urinal at a horror convention.

Elena was looking more and more pained by the minute, and presently she seized the espresso earmarked for Brad and downed it in one gulp. She scrutinized me. "I know you," she said at last. "Villacin, eh?"

"But Ms. Darlov, I mean Elena... you've never seen me before in your life."

"I'm a very hands-on studio head," she said. "I personally okay every personnel file... every errand boy, every secretary... even every mailroom flunky."

Bobby — of all people — actually shut up. I smiled wryly. "You caught me," I said. "Gotta hand it to you."

She cackled. "Well, since you're already on my payroll, and since your scrawny little ass is mine to do with as I please —"

I gulped. Her appetites were legendary.

"I see my reputation precedes me."

I gulped harder.

"All right," she said at last. "What the hell." She thrust the dog-eared screenplay on my coffee tray. "Fix Bill's script by morning, and I'll give you 10 grand. If it sucks, you get sacked."

"I—" I said.

"Union rules don't allow that kind of a deal structure —" Bobby began.

"This rule's not union," Elena said. "But I will throw in a couple of perks. You can have my permanent suite at the Beverly Plaza for the duration. It should be a little better writing environment than whatever miserable garret you're in. No hookers though. Actually, I'll have you locked in. Unlimited room service of course. Cable turned off though. Nah, leave it on, there may be something worth stealing. All right then. I'll see the rewrite over breakfast." She began barking orders into a cell phone.

The elevator suddenly jerked up the final three feet, and Elena stalked off in the direction of Brad's private lounge. We never made it there; two of Elena's goons materialized from behind a stack of packing crates and escorted us off the premises.

THE SUITE AT THE BEVERLY PLAZA! YOU'VE SEEN IT IN MOVIES, BUT actually setting foot in it was — different. I unpacked my laptop, found the dedicated data line, plugged everything in at a mahogany desk next to the French doors that opened out to the private jacuzzi

in its polarized-glass gazebo on its own little marble balcony. My agent left, the porters left, the room service waiter left after depositing a monstrous tray of beluga on toast points and a magnum of Moët, and there I was with my computer and a pile of the worst shit the world's most highly paid screenwriter had ever produced.

It was unsalvageable. I don't know how much cocaine it takes to get this incoherent, but it smelled like old Bill had blown his entire fee on his nose. From the opening scene, where a dysfunctional white trash family gets raped by aliens, to the first plot point, when a psychic channels the spirit of JFK into an Egyptian mummy, through the chase scene where Mt. Rushmore turns out to be a dormant volcano and a swarm of killer bees attacks Washington —

It was a mess. It wasn't even psychedelic. It was just bad.

Bobby Detweiler had destroyed my life.

I had downed over half of the magnum. I had scarfed all the caviar, and sent down for the assorted sushi platter, and washed that down with a fifth of Absolut. I had gotten all the way to FADE IN. I had to face it. I couldn't save this script.

I wheeled the food trolley to the door and was about to rap for the waiting attendant to come and get it — they were watching the door in case I tried to escape. But just then, this weird little man rolls out from under the thick white tablecloth. "Need a script doctor, do you?" he squawked. "Dr. Rumpole, at your service."

"I've had too much to drink," I said.

"Indeed you have." This guy couldn't have been more than 4'-11", and he had little pointy ears, but he was dressed to the gills in Hollywood executive chic. I didn't know Armani came in his size. "So how much is Darlov paying you, about 20 grand?"

"Ten," I said ruefully. "And I'll be fired if I don't come through. She doesn't really mean that, does she?" I must be drunk! I thought. I'm confiding in a fucking leprechaun.

"Okay," he said. "So I'll make you a deal. You write me out a check for 10 grand. Postdate it 48 hours. I'll spin this shit into gold, and if it doesn't work out, you can stop payment tomorrow."

I didn't have much choice, so I let this guy sit down at the desk. I went back to drinking. You know, it is perfectly possible to do a screenplay in a night. Eight pages an hour, that'll run you maybe 11, 12 hours. Even I've done that, though admittedly it was only for Roger.

Well, this guy didn't type any eight pages an hour. He typed so fast you couldn't see his fingers. The screen itself scrolled by in a blur, so I couldn't follow along. Not that I could read by then. I don't think I could have read my own name. In fact, I passed out, and when I woke up Dr. Rumpole was gone.

It wasn't even dawn, and there were 120 flawlessly typed pages on the coffee table, and when I started to read I knew I had a winner. Rumpole had relegated all those outrageous fantasy elements to a single dream sequence. The dreamer was the young son of the dysfunctional trailer park family, the aliens profound metaphors for alienation... and redemption. The sister's multiple personality stemmed logically from the family's searing trauma, and backdating the entire tale against the background of the Vietnam War provided a trenchant symbology for illuminating these drab characters' lives and giving meaning to their miserable existences. I'm not ashamed to say that I was weeping my ass off, and in a year's time I got to weep on national television, too, because I got to share the Oscar with Bill, who didn't bother to tell the press that his final contribution consisted of little more than the names of the characters.

I didn't mind losing the 10 grand. Elena put me on a hundred-grand retainer to come up with one high concept a month. Thank God they never actually used any of them.

BOBBY DETWEILER WAS STILL MY AGENT A YEAR LATER, WHICH WAS just as well because I had blown the hundred thou on Vegas and on alimony, and I was living in the same temp apartment I was in before it all started, only the carpet had gone from beige to brown, what with the coffee stains, the cigarette ash, and the occasional barf binge.

I was standing in line at Social Security, trying to talk them into giving me food stamps, when my flip phone went off. Bad thing to happen when you're claiming to be destitute.

It was Bobby. It seemed that Elena Darlov had gotten greedy again. Two hundred grand, a two-day turnaround, or I'd never work in this town again. It wasn't Bill this time. It was Joe, who'd run off to Monte Carlo with his three mil, leaving behind only a tattered treatment to which Dustin, Bette, and Arnold were inseparably attached. Each star had received a \$10 million retainer just to sit around, and with overhead that made 49 megabucks already in the hole without a single frame having been shot.

Elena was late, so Bobby and I had a couple of drinks at Musso and Frank's while we waited for her to show up. "There's a confession I've got to make," I said.

"Don't tell me," he said. "The little man with pointy ears?"

"You knew?"

"Dr. Rumpole's a kind of legend around this town," he said. "At least, among certain top agents." He grinned smugly. He was now a top agent, you see... all because of that frantic night two years before. In fact, he was doing a whole lot better than me.

"Who is he?"

"Some say an incredibly eccentric studio executive who's on the payroll of all the top studios. Some say he's a sort of screenwriting idiot savant, such a klutz at the Hollywood shuffle that he's reduced to ghosting other people's scripts. Someone told me he's channeling D.W. Griffith. They say he has the Oscar committee in his pocket."

"Great. So my whole career now hangs on the whim of some bozo who's possessed by dead directors."

"Well," he said, "if Dr. Rumpole has come into your life, then you shouldn't have any trouble doctoring Elena's latest project."

"Yeah, but what if Dr. Rumpole doesn't show up?"

"I have my own theory about that," I said. "I think that Dr. Rumpole is an archetypal construct, brought to life by the frenzied collective agony of Hollywood screenwriters. You know, when reality fails you, fairy tale kind of takes over. We make our own magic here. This is Hollywood."

"I see. So if he ever gives me any shit, I just pull the Rumpelstiltskin gambit, I suppose."

"Hey, it could be worse, Adam. At least he's not demanding your soul."

"You are so fucking glib," I said. "You were a lot more palatable when you were Sullivan-Lechner's official computer nerd."

"Oh, I still *am* a nerd," he said, "only I have much more expensive toys now. You should see my custom Web search engine. It can sift through a trillion megs in a nanosecond. Why, with this new algorithm, I could rule the universe." I started to glaze over.

Elena showed up then, and we had the usual hour-long Hollywood lunch, studiously avoiding any mention of business until the last five minutes, when Elena produced the keys to the Beverly Plaza suite from her purse and announced that my limo was waiting. "Forty-eight hours," she said. "Because on Monday, our option runs out on the original property, which means that we kiss the whole 49 million goodbye. A lot is riding on this, Adam. You may even get a promotion."

She rolled her eyes. The truth is, I was still drawing my salary as a mail room clerk, though I hadn't set foot in that hellhole for a year. That's how Stupendous Entertainment is. People's job titles have absolutely nothing to do with who's really minding the store. For example, Elena was still only vice-president of development. Rumor had it her theoretical boss had set up permanent residence in a Thai brothel.

TWO DAYS AND A POSTDATED CHECK FOR \$200,000 LATER, I WAS ONCE again on the road to the Oscars. This time I had to share credit with Joe and Paul, who tinkered with the dialogue on the set, and the two of them got to appear on Larry King... but what the hell? I had a contract for half a million a year, and I only had to come up with a new high concept every two months. Not that they ever used any of them.

But I was getting nervous. These things tend to come in threes, and you know that the third time's the killer. And the stakes were higher. Elena had begun to indulge her legendary appetites. She was particularly fond of the Oscars; I always had to clean them off with soap and

water every time she came to my condo. Did I say condo? Soon I was moving into the Stupendous complex itself, that medieval castle athwart the Hollywood Hills, the legendary labyrinth of a thousand rooms. Like some primordial tree, the complex burrowed deep into the hills themselves. There were forgotten passageways and monastic cells without windows. There were also fairy penthouses perched on unrelated parapets. And security within security, once you were part of the inner elite. The Pentagon had nothing on Stupendous.

But the little old man was giving me nightmares. I remembered him hammering away at that second script. *The Lover*, it was called. A chillingly sadomasochistic love story about a concentration camp commandant and a Ukrainian prisoner — Bette lost 60 pounds to play the role, Dustin gained 50 — Joe's entire treatment tossed into the trash, the setting changed from Fire Island to Auschwitz — one little shift in perspective, and God, the characters went from yuppie stereotypes to mythic archetypes, the games from petty suburban bickerings to huge vistas of love, death, and eternity.

Thing about it all — and you don't see it in a lot of screenplays — the dialogue, the settings, they all seemed absolutely real. The illusion was astounding. Whole characters were painted with just a few deft details, a few telling words. The screenplay made you ache. The actors, the director had all their work done for them; they might as well have been puppets.

Dr. Rumpole hadn't even bothered to talk to me. He'd been in the suite, waiting, on the bed, watching an Oprah rerun. He put out his hand for the check, tucked it in his pocket, and went straight to my laptop.

And I went straight to my Valium.



VALIUM HAD BEEN THE drug of choice for a while, but the nightmares still wouldn't go away. Usually I'd wake up in medieval tights — worse yet, a dress, though I'm totally not that way —

spinning straw in a monstrous stone castle. And Dr. Rumpole would be leaping and cavorting and cackling and shrieking out, "My name! My name! My name!"

Since when does a fairy tale make you wake up screaming in the night? Wandering the Stupendous corridors at three in the morning was a gothic experience. The business towers were all locked, of course; Elena had her own wing, accessible only by punching in a seven-digit code; my own little area was as medieval as my nightmares, complete with suits of armor and Beauty-and-the-Beast wall sconces shaped like human arms.

My living room overlooked the Hollywood Freeway and the Capitol Records building... and all the lights and speeding cars below made me feel even more isolated somehow, even more imprisoned... and Valium became an addiction, soon to be joined by those little blue and red pills from a little pharmacy on Melrose, the one that's disguised as a bondage boutique.

So, doing lunch at Le Dome with Bobby Detweiler, admiring his new Rolls, I blurted it out: "I've gotta know, Bobby. Who he is."

"Really?" said Bobby. "Look, Elena has a job for you. Well, this is bigger than Elena, actually. It's Steve and Jeff as well, they're buying Stupendous out, you know; and there's a script that's just got to be fixed."

"Don't tell me. By tomorrow."

"They've already committed a hundred million. You've got the rep now, the ultimate script doctor. They're willing to go two point five, even."

"No," I said. "I'll just have to sign it over to the little man. And the leftover perks won't sustain any of my habits."

"Look, Adam, you're overdoing it... I know a great place to dry out... Cancun, secluded, nobody will know who you are..."

"Look," I said, "what else is Elena willing to give me?"

"She's desperate, Adam," said Bobby. "I think she's running out of bargaining chips with Steve. Oh, and there's even a rumor of a hostile takeover by Rupert. I think she'll go for the proverbial 'half my kingdom' deal — co-equal status with her. She'll even throw in her shopworn body, though I don't doubt you've already had your fill of that — who hasn't?"

"You mean actual stock participation? Part ownership of Stupendous?"

That was an exhilarating thought for someone who still, technically, was a mailroom clerk.

"I think I can get you that," Bobby said, and he smiled that devilish grin that only agents know how to do, straight from the Mephistopheles Method school of agenting.

"All right," I said. "But I need some ammunition for little old Dr. Rumpole when he shows up. Like, for example, his true name. Surely not Rumpelstiltskin — that's too obvious. But a man like that, makes his entire living sneaking up on desperate screenwriters, accepts no credit, well... he's gotta have some kind of dark secret."

"Well, why didn't you tell me?" said Bobby. "Underneath my Versace jacket, I'm still Mr. Nerd Hacker Supreme, you know. You got anything to go on?"

"Like what?"

"Social security number? Old ID cards? Maybe even... fingerprints? I've got a back door to the FBI's fingerprint archive..."

"Well," I said, as I cut off one more little bite of my \$60 rack of lamb, "he did use my laptop."

"Then," my agent said, reprising his grin, "I can deliver him to you. Dr. Rumpole has no secrets. If I can't dig up dirt on the man, my name's not Robert Ian Detweiler, III."

"By tomorrow?"

"I might need time," he said. "Hacking's not as easy as it used to be."

I took my laptop from my Dior attaché case and handed it over, half expecting Bobby to pull out the old print-dusting kit from his utility belt right then and there, over the soufflé and espresso. But he merely put it away and we sat for a moment, pretending to be normal, waiting for a very harried Elena Darlov to come dashing in to join us for a quick cognac before her next meeting.

THESE DAYS, I MERITED AN ENTIRE FLOOR OF THE BEVERLY PLAZA, but I was still locked in. It was all part of the myth, you see, like Houdini. And I still had the threat of execution hanging over me, in the shape of a signed confession from my dealer. The stakes got higher each time, but this time I was determined to quizz the old elf.

He ripped aside the shower curtain this time, re-enacting *Psycho*, wielding a pen instead of a kitchen knife. I didn't scream. I was expecting some kind of apocalyptic entrance. "Two point five and half the kingdom," said Dr. Rumpole, "or 10 years for possession and conspiracy. Not much of a choice this time."

"You might have let me get cleaned up in peace."

"You can clean your body," he said, "but you'll never get all the lint off your soul."

"Has the champagne come? Wait for me in the living room. I'll sign it when you're done."

"I'll have coffee," he said.

I took a really long shower. Make him wait, I thought, make him sweat. Although of course, I was the one sweating.

When I emerged, I presented him with the latest misbegotten masterpiece — which had cost the studio five million dollars and was perhaps the worst screenplay of all time — and I said, "How do you do it?"

"What, you want my trade secrets?" said Dr. Rumpole.

Well, yes. I mean look at the last one you did. The pathos, the palpability of that concentration camp experience. It was as though you were telling your own life story."

Dr. Rumpole smiled. A wan smile, and only for a moment. Then he said, "Well, come on, we haven't got all night. A new computer, I see! Well, I'm glad your excesses have left you a little something for a few toys. Well, I'll just start now. You go sit over there in the corner and get yourself royally smashed."

"Not this time, Dr. Rumpole," I said. "I'm going to go in the other room and work on one of my own projects."

The little man cackled. "So the hackmeister has one of those Great American Novels hidden in a drawer, eh? Or a slender volume of earth-shattering poetry? Or perhaps even a real script?"

I did go in the other room, but not to work on my novel. It was to set up my other computer, hook up the modem, and get a frantic message to Bobby Detweiler. Who messaged me right back. I fixed myself some strong black coffee. I was going to have to move Heaven and Earth tonight. Which was a lot easier than you might think, with the resources of Stupendous at my beck and call. I made some calls. Now and then I went to the door and peered at the old man, who was wordprocessing up a storm. If anything he was wilder than before. You could almost see the smoke twirling up from the keyboard. His eyes burned red in the monitor screen. The text was scrolling up in a blur. He was in his own universe. He was inspired. He had the touch, the creative spark, the thing that mediocrities like me can only dream about. Oh, but I hated him. I needed to hate him. Otherwise....

I drank more espresso. Went to the bathroom to flush a packet of pills, in case I got too tempted. Sat on the bed watching *I Love Lucy* reruns, waiting for dawn.



VER A CROISSANT, I PAGED through the screenplay as the polluted sunrise streamed into the suite. It was a work of unmitigated genius. A story that could otherwise have been the most maudlin, cliché-ridden, barf-induc-

ing pile of turds had been transformed into the most refined, the most trenchant, the most soul-stirring paradigm of the human condition.

It was a simple enough situation. A kid dying of AIDS becoming the vehicle for the reuniting of his dysfunctional family. I mean, come on, there's a movie of the week like that every week. But Dr. Rumpole made the old tropes sing. A hideous plot device — the kid having visions in which he experiences his past lives — became a Jacob's Ladder to enlightenment. There was hope in the ultimate horror of his life. There was vision. There was redemption. God, but I wept.

"It's all right, then?" Dr. Rumpole said, and handed me the pen so I could sign over the entire profits of my perfidy.

I ripped up the deal memo. "Not so fast," I said, "Mr. Rumpelstiltskin — or should I say Herr Professor Doktor Rumpelstiltschen? This time I've got something on you."

And then I told him what Bobby Detweiler had found out.

The fingerprint search at the FBI Web site had led to a photograph. A signature had led to a Swiss bank account by way of a CIA back door. An account number had led to the Web site of the Wiesenthal people. This harmless little dwarf, seer into men's hearts, explicator of the human condition, was also a Nazi war criminal on the lam.

"Ah well," said Dr. Rumpole, "it was bound to happen sooner or later. But no publicity, if you can avoid it. One way or another, one pays for everything, but I do have grandchildren, who know nothing... have you already called the authorities?"

"Yes," I said.

Continued on page 87

On Overworld, Caine is revered as an assassin.

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of both worlds, he's hailed as a legend!

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WHAT THIS STORY'S ABOUT

THE BULLET stirred from its bed of bone in the back of the skull, then

HAPPY

MIGHT SEEM RATHER MUNDANE.

leaped through the bloody tunnel of brain tissue behind it. Neurons closed on neu-

ENDING

BUT THIS PIECE IS NOT

rons and severed capillaries, reknit and healed as the bullet flashed through the

ABOUT WHAT IT'S ABOUT.

brain, out the hole in the roof of the mouth, past shattered teeth — whose fragile

BY JAMES VAN PELT
Illustration by Greg Carter

fragments came home again to perfect, flawless form — and flew down the gun barrel to nest tightly in the now-unexplored casing.

Against his lips, the barrel pressed heavily and tasted of oil.

Bob took the gun away from his mouth, rested it in his lap, and opened his eyes. Tears crept up his cheek as he turned his gaze away from the gun and to the window of his study where autumn leaves streamed past, their tattered glory afire in the evening Sun. He couldn't see the elm or willows, just the leaves dancing by, and a fanciful thought returned to him: If you can't see the source, who can tell if leaves are falling to the ground or jumping back to the limbs? And what does it matter? The leaves are in the air. They don't know their direction.

They tumbled across the window in shades of gold and red for a long time before he put the gun back in the desk drawer, and picked up the phone.

It droned in his ear like a death knell for a minute, then clicked. "You're no hero," unsaid Mrs. Downs in his ear. "You had a responsibility."

Bob replied, "It was just a lesson. A discussion of story theory. How could I know he identified so strongly?"

"The boy believed in you. You walked on water." Her voice stayed flat and cold. Nothing remained in it. No hope. No anger. She could have been reciting a laundry list. "He wanted to be a writer like you."

"Karl made choices. I believe if he had lived he could have done anything. Karl had great potential." Bob remembered their first days together. Karl sat in the back of the room, writing in his tight, black scribble every word Bob said. Karl always wrote no matter what else was going on in the room, his dark eyes occasionally looking furtively away from his legal pad. He'd shown a story to Bob after the first week of the creative writing class. It was a 1,000-word time travel piece called "Rats Live on No Evil Star."

Karl had handed him the story reluctantly, frightened. Bob knew he'd signed up for the class because Bob had published. "Here," Karl said. "It's no good."

Mrs. Downs said, "Nothing you do today can make a difference. I know who my boy was before. I know who you are now."

Bob held the phone tightly against his ear. He could almost feel her presence. She stood in the room with him, her lips only centimeters away. "You have to blame me, I know. My name was in the note, but I didn't see it coming. It's too much ... it's way too much to ask for forgiveness, but I hope you understand."

"Why did you call?" Mrs. Downs didn't sound surprised at all.

"Mrs. Downs, I'm Bob Wells," Bob said, his voice squeezed tight and scratchy. "Karl's teacher."

Bob dialed.

Bob put the phone down gently, fearfully, and full of guilt. On the desk in front of him lay three pieces of paper: a form rejection from HarperPrism telling him his novel was being returned; a formal request from the school board for his resignation; and a note to him from Karl that had been folded into the back of the book. The book Karl had given him, Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, held down the notes.

EVERYWHERE BOB LOOKED WITHIN HIMSELF HE COULD SEE NOTHING but darkness: No way out.

Gazing blankly at the letter on the floor, he thought of all the time in class lecturing from his position as a soon-to-be published novelist; all the conferences with students who signed up for his courses on the weight of his reputation, and it pushed upon him with the bulk of a terrible lie. He remembered looking at students' stories, his red pen in hand, marking in the margin: *Unbelievable dialogue; What's the conflict?; or Why should the reader care?* And as he marked, he thought about how important his words would be on their papers. This came from the Bob Wells, they would think. He was my creative writing teacher in high school.

He held his hand out, and Karl's note fluttered from the floor back to his hand. Bob's eye held to the last words that he had written on

the paper — the words that he had written that ignored so much of what Karl said, that refused to read between the lines. They were, "This is an unlikely idea for a story, Karl. Trash it and work on something more believable."

Above that, Karl's note read,

Mr. Wells,

I know you don't think I can make it as a writer, but I've thought a lot about what you said about how stories are structured. I still think you are wrong about that, just as you are wrong about failing me. A story ought to work the way the universe works. According to Hawking, the universe tends toward *disorder*, not order. Cups don't leap off the linoleum and reassemble on table tops; they fall and shatter. Chaos is the rule, and that's the way we perceive it. So fiction that makes "order out of the chaos of life," as you put it, runs counter to the direction of the universe.

If I lived my life according to your description of stories, jumping off a cliff shouldn't kill me. The disorder of my corpse at the bottom should undo itself and I'd fly to the top alive.

I think I can prove it. I can write a story that will get an "A." Kind of a performance story. I'm a good writer. It will be a story about a cliff and how the real direction of a story should be disorder and mystery, not order and understanding.

Sincerely,
Karl Downs

BOB PUT THE NOTE BACK INTO THE BOOK, AND RETURNED IT TO HIS desk. He retreated to a corner of the room and sat in it, his back squeezed by the conjunction of the walls.

After a while, he stood, then backed out of the room, his head

Karl's empty
black hole,

hanging, his hands like rags dangling from his arms.

Walking through the campus, he barely noticed the students passing around him. Their conversations stopped as he approached.

"That's him," Bob heard one say behind him; then the boys walked by silently, their eyes darting at Bob and switching away. Facing each other, the distance between them grew, until he saw them talking with animated pleasure.

In the principal's office, the silence lingered and vibrated like a discordant note.

"Thank you," said Bob, finally, knowing that it wasn't appropriate, but what else could he say?

"We think it best if you resigned immediately," the principal said as she closed his file.

Bob shook his head as if he were trying to wake from a dream — one of those nightmares where he knew what was going to happen but where he could do nothing to stop it. "What are you suggesting?"

"We're going to have to make a change. The advanced class in creative writing won't be offered again. It was a mistake to put you in charge of it. Karl shouldn't have been there."

"He had talent, but the boy was troubled. I didn't know," Bob said

in surrender, putting hardly any voice behind the words, nearly whispering them.

The principal, a woman five years younger than Bob, unfolded the photo-copy of the suicide note. She appeared to mull over the lines, and Bob tried to think of anything to say. He thought, they're blaming me! And when he looked inside, he saw that they were right. The knowledge spun up to him darkly.

"The school board," she said, "has seen this. They met last night just to talk about it. It's bad, Bob. Your name is all over it, and we talked to kids in your class. They confirmed much of what Karl says here. They said you badgered him. Their words. One said you ridiculed Karl. Another said you singled him out."

Numbness dominated his face. He wanted to reach up and touch his cheeks to see if they were real. His shirt felt too tight; he could hardly breathe within it. "Karl wrote notes all the time."

"They found this from Karl," she said, holding a sheet of paper. "In his coat pocket. You know, he left his coat on the rail? It was neatly folded there. Did you know he took his shoes and socks off? Why would he do that? Fifteen years old, and he dives off a cliff, but he takes his shoes and socks off."

"I don't understand it either," Bob said. The whole conversation might as well be taking place in an echo chamber, he thought. It seemed so unreal; so much like it all was unwinding around him.

"Why did it happen, Bob?" The principal sat back in her chair. Bob could tell she'd already made up her mind.

BOB SURVEYED THE EMPTY CLASSROOM. MARCIA BINDER, WHO LOVED him best after Karl, had left a pile of crumpled paper on her desk. He could see his own comments written on one of them; it was a feedback sheet on her last story. "Good job," it read. "With a little more work, this will really shine." She'd beamed when she'd read

school students who think of you as the enemy, thought Bob. Marcia's lips were thin, white lines; her hands were locked firmly on top of her desk. She looked at him without blinking.

Bob realized that they couldn't get past it. Karl's empty desk vibrated like a terrible black hole, sucking all his words to it, all of his energy in, and it returned nothing.

After 45 minutes of lecture, Bob gave up. The lesson wasn't going to work. They were more than silent; it was if they were seething in their seats.

He tried to move on, to follow his lesson plan. Yesterday had been a review of building scenes. "A scene is like a tiny story in itself," he'd said. "The beginning will be related to the end. Whatever action you start with will complete the scene; whatever emotion you provoke will be a part of its structure. It'll change the story and move it, so despair moves toward hope, or victimization to control. Everything in the scene contributes to the story, but the scene is a story, too."

Today he was to discuss techniques in description. The further he went though the more obvious it was. They hated him.

He waited for a question. The material was abstract. Generally the students couldn't follow him when he went into fiction theory, but he'd present it anyway until someone asked him for an example. No one said a word.

He started class with, "Order in a description is discovery. The reader discovers what is there in the order you present it, as if you are holding the reader's head and directing his attention. Presenting the information in a different order gives the reader a different perspective, and it can change the whole story. Order is everything."

The tardy bell rang. Facing their desks, the students backed out of the room.

desk vibrated like a terrible sucking all his words to it...

it the day before, and the color had risen in her cheeks when she'd thanked him after class. She has a crush on me, he'd thought, as she smiled shyly, holding her books close to her chest.

The doors opened and students backed in, pointedly not looking at Bob as they took their seats. Outside in the hall, the end-of-class bell rang, and the angry mutter rose like a muddy creek.

"It's a variation on the old Chinese blessing," Bob said desperately, aware that he'd lost them completely. "May you always have interesting material."

No one raised their hands. None of them wrote anything he was saying into their notebooks.

"There's a story about William Faulkner at his father's deathbed when the old man passed on. Faulkner was supposed to have gone to a mirror and looked into his own face so that later he could write an accurate description of what a man whose father just died looked like. I'm not saying we should view Karl's death as a source for fiction, but we have gone through something here, and that something will affect us and our writing. We're more plugged in to the reality of the human drama."

None of their faces offered support. Nothing is colder than high

Karl's death came with him into the empty classroom, and the note from HarperPrism telling him that his novel "... does not fit our current publishing needs," still reverberated. The two seemed linked. As he prepared his lecture for the day, though, he felt the old confidence returning. In my room, I'm king, he thought. They can beat you down, but they can't kill you. Dozens of publishers rejected John Grisham.

Yesterday's ugliness could be washed away. They could start fresh. He waited almost eagerly for the students to come to class.

THE RADIO UNANNOUNCED THE NEWS OF KARL'S DEATH WHILE BOB filled his breakfast bowl, spoon after spoon.

"IT'S PROBABLY NO GOOD EITHER," SAID BOB, VENOM DRIPPING FROM each word.

Karl handed Bob a 19-page manuscript. "Here's my semester project," he said. "You won't get it, I'll bet."

Stunned, the rest of the class watched. Bob knew he was out of control, but the anger rolled up within him. The class would be so much better without this imbecile, thought Bob. This is advanced

creative writing, and they're taking it because I'm a real writer, not one of those lit fools that make up the rest of the department.

"You can't be a writer if you won't learn!" Bob's voice boomed in the room, overwhelming Karl finally. The boy shrank within himself, as if he suddenly understood that their battle was no mock game but a serious war. He reacted as if he had just realized his teacher hated him. Karl's neck nearly disappeared as his shoulders rose to his ears.

Bob shouted, "You have a crummy attitude!"

HarperPrism's rejection buzzed around in Bob's thoughts like a malevolent horsefly. He couldn't concentrate on Karl, who glowered in the seat beside him. The arrogance of this kid, thought Bob. What does he know about fiction? Who does he think he is, telling me what makes a story work?

"You told us that a reader doesn't remember a story chronologically," said Karl. "You said that the story is like a memory — that the reader has access to all of the story at once after he's read it — so it shouldn't matter what order it's told in. Time in the mind flows both ways, which is what Hawking said. You said that a writer revises the first word of a story knowing the last word, and that a writer writes from the end. My story does that."

Bob gave up on lecturing to the whole class. Only Karl existed.

Bob unwrote an "F" at the story, his pen tip sucking

Only Karl needed to hear this. Only Karl challenged Bob's knowledge of writing. How could he? Bob thought. I'm published. I have put in the lonely hours and hours writing until my brain loosened up, and the muses came down and touched me.

"You have an 'F' on this, young man, not only because the story is three sentences long, but because it demonstrates no understanding of the order in which a story must be told. You have started with the end and moved to the beginning. The whole story, and I quote, is 'He died. He struggled. He was born.' No matter how you revise this, it will never be a story. It's backward."

Karl scrambled through his notes. "Last week," he said, reading from his cramped handwriting on the yellow legal pad, "you told us that a story has 'profluence.' You said that was 'movement.' You also told us that stories are about reversals. 'Whatever condition begins the story must be changed by the end.' My story fulfills those requirements."

"You have purposely ignored every piece of advice I've offered about creating readable fiction. What hurts most here is that you have talent. You know your way around a sentence. There's a spark of imagination within you. But you waste it all in this tripe. Your 'story,' Karl, doesn't meet any of the requirements of narration."

Karl said, "It boils fiction to its essence. Stephen Hawking has told me more about the way the world works than you have. He says the arrow of time can point either way. We just perceive it the one way and not the other. The universe either moves toward the Big Bang or away from it, and that's reflected in stories."

The class giggled nervously. For a second, Bob realized he was playing to the crowd. "You don't make sense, Karl. My head aches just trying to follow your thoughts. I get twitchy thinking about it."

Karl said, "There's lots of ways of perceiving the world. Looking backward ought to reveal themes we haven't explored the stodgy old way. I mean, for crying out loud! Plod, plod, plod. Once upon a time, to they lived happily ever after. Don't you think it's more interesting to start with the result and see how it happened?"

Karl hunched forward in his seat, intense and fiery, his dark eyes lit up like Bob had never seen them.

"I know the rules," Karl said. "I've known them since Saturday morning cartoons. All of us" He waved his arm to encompass the entire class. "... have heard a million stories."

Clenching his fists at his side, Bob said, "You can't break the rules until you know the rules." He's mocking me, thought Bob.

"You've got to be willing to experiment," said Karl, laughing after he saw his grade. His legs sprawled out comfortably from under the desk, and he leaned back in his chair, relaxed. Bob remembered when Karl had been frightened to show him his first story. I've created a monster, thought Bob. I hinted he had talent, and now he doesn't believe he needs me anymore. Well, it's time to take Mr. know-it-all down a notch.

All of them looked over their stories. Bob had written voluminous notes at the ends of each filled with suggestions about plot and pacing, description and conflict. He struggled with his face though. He

felt sure they could read his expression and could see the HarperPrism rejection in it.

The class began innocently enough. Holding his disappointment inside like a sullen colt, Bob backed down the aisles between the desks, watching each student look over their grades eagerly, then handing their stories to him before assuming an expectant expression. Finally, he stood at the front of the class, holding their stories in a neat stack. At the bottom, because he sat in the last seat, waited Karl's story, a single page with little writing on it beside the red "F" in a big circle.

STILL HUNGRY; HE HADN'T EATEN ANYTHING, BOB LEFT FOR SCHOOL.

He knew they'd rejected it by the opening salutation; "Dear Contributor."

Trembling, he folded the letter neatly, slid it back into the envelope and unripped it closed. This is it, he thought. They've bought the novel. They have to. The editor was so gushing in her request to see the complete manuscript after he'd sent the sample chapters.

He'd told everyone in school, casually, just dropping it in at the end of conversations. "Oh," he'd said, "by the way, HarperPrism has my novel now." Invariably they'd ask when it would be in the stores. He'd shrug his shoulders ruefully. "Who can guess? You know how the publishing world is." He'd wink as if they both were knowledgeable conspirators.

In the left corner, the return address said HarperPrism Publishing. Coming out of his house, with a bounce in his step, he backed to the mailbox and put the letter in it.

Lunch is an adventure, he thought several weeks later. The mail comes at lunch, and who knows what magazine has mailed an acceptance. Maybe, even, some news of the novel.

SETTLED COMFORTABLY INTO HIS CHAIR NOW, BOB PICKED UP MARCIA BINDER'S story, which turned out to be a sweetly told romance between a talented high school student and her art teacher. The ending scene took place in a subway station as the student left for college. She waits for him, hoping that he'll see her off, but he never comes. In the story, she'd not told the teacher of her love, and most of the story was of her struggling with her feelings. Bob paged back to the dream sequence in the middle—a graphically rendered fantasy of the student and teacher's consummation of the relationship. Taking Bob's advice to heart, she'd concentrated on senses other than sight and sound: the pressure of a fingertip, a suggestion of lemonade on the tongue, a thread of hair brushing a forehead, a hint of coppery excitement in the breath, and the rasp of a sheet sliding across skin. He wrote comments in the margin complimenting her on her use of sensory detail.

Five weeks had passed since HarperPrism had asked to see the novel, and the joy of it buoyed him through the drudgery of grading, through the frustration of teaching to freshmen and the inanity of departmental politics. High hopes and advanced creative writing pushed him through the day.

Bob neatly unwrote an "F" at the end of Karl's story, his pen tip rolling across the red line, sucking the ink back until the page was

"Umm," Bob said to Marcia, "It sounds like a challenge. I'm sure you could handle it," and thought stupid to him. Every word had a possible double meaning. Finally he offered, "You're a good writer. Give it a try."

Marcia looked at him, her eyes gleaming and frank. Bob forced himself not to glance down. He was sure, now, that she'd loosened a button on her blouse since he'd sat next to her.

"So what do you think?" she said.

She leaned forward, the tips of her fingers nearly touching Bob's hand.

Marcia said, "I've been exploring May–September relationships. I thought my semester project could be something that continues that theme." She sounded nervous and excited, as if she were torn between fearfulness and something else. Bob couldn't decide what it was, and with her so close to him, nearly whispering, he had a hard time thinking about it. Maybe it was love—maybe lust. He remembered the first assignment she'd handed in, an autobiographical description of a date she'd had just a month earlier where a boy had tried to kiss her. She'd confessed in the story that she'd never kissed a boy before, and the prospect had scared her, but she hadn't been able to sleep that night. In the story, she felt the ghost pressure of the kiss that never happened on her lips all the next day.

He caught a whiff of her shampoo, a soft fruity smell like peaches and cream, but under that a hint of just her. It wasn't unpleasant. Definitely warm though, and animal. He wondered if she had P.E. the hour before his class.

"What will your semester project be, Marcia?" said Bob. Her hair hung across the side of her face, partially hiding her eyes.

He couldn't help but notice Marcia at the end of her row, glancing at him as he moved from student to student. She was wearing a loose peasant blouse, the top button undone, and when she leaned forward to write, he caught a glimpse of lace in the swells of shadow. As professional as he wanted to be he couldn't help but notice, and he wondered if she wanted him to see. She leaned a lot when he was around, cooly, as if part of her didn't know she was doing it while another part did, as if her subconscious controlled her posture.

"You'll be a hero, Mr. Wells," said Karl enthusiastically as Bob unleft his desk. "It'll be cool."

Flattered, but not sure how to handle the attention, Bob said, "That might not be a good thing to do. It could be embarrassing."

"See, if I base my semester project on people I know, then I've got a better chance to get the characterization right."

"Why would you want to do that?" Bob looked around the room.

"I've been reading Hawking, like you suggested, and he's really given me some ideas, and the stuff you just said, too. I see now that you were right. Typical time travel stories are old hat, so I'm going to write a new kind. I mean, why should the character be the only one who gets to travel in time?" said Karl. "And you'll be the protagonist."

"What will your project be?" asked Bob. Karl straightened the stack of pages on his desk, all of them apparently like the top one, filled with his crabbed, black handwriting.

Bob started class with a short lecture on metafiction. "Some stories," he said, "turn the tools of fiction upon itself. It's like Ferris Bueller talking to the audience, or *The Never Ending Story*, which makes the movie goers a part of the story at the end. Any story that reminds the readers they are reading a story is a kind of metafiction."

The class greeted him with smiles. Their eagerness to learn seemed genuine. They loved him.

"Not yet," he said.

"Any news on the novel?" someone asked.

Bending down, he placed his pencil on the floor. He stood.

The pencil unrolled into his hand.

He backed to the door and opened it. The door grew smaller and smaller as he walked away.

He was unbearingly. He was unthinking. The events unrolled behind him. Life was good and getting better, and the innocence of youth waited for him. ♣

end of Karl's the ink back...

clean of any mark. He moved on to the next student's work.

Closing his eyes, Bob thought, I must have praised the boy too much. He needs to be shook up, for his own good. In the end, Karl will appreciate the lesson. He'll look back and recognize my guiding influence. Almost as good as "Bob Wells" on the cover of his own novel, Bob thought, would be the inscription inside his talented protégé's first book, "To my mentor, Bob Wells."

Bob knew he'd have to get Karl's attention some way; the grade wouldn't be enough. Why, the boy might even take the "F" as his own "Red Badge of Courage." Hadn't all the greats been misunderstood? Who recognized Poe in his lifetime? And Fitzgerald had ended his career in Hollywood scripting hack screenplays.

He tapped his forehead in disbelief. Karl's new story was only three sentences long! In a stack of students' stories, pristinely enclosed with clear, plastic covers and all 10 pages or more, the single sheet of paper with Karl's name on it seemed like a joke. He read it twice.

The Sun rose slowly and barely noticed in the west. Paper after paper he read until he came to Karl's.

He read the first story on the stack.

THE BELL RANG, ENDING CLASS. I COULDN'T BE HAPPIER, THOUGHT Bob. In all of their many ways, they love me.

The others were busy at their desks; even Marcia Binder seemed busy now, writing. She checked her notes, then returned to her story. She had really affected him, he realized. He passed a hand over his eyebrows, depositing a thin sheen of sweat.

Thankful, Bob backed away from Marcia's desk and sat next to the next student. "So, what's your plan for your project?" Bob said. He wiped his palms against his pants.

*Wizards and mages and curses and lost cities and noble quests —
they're all here. Go ahead — lose yourself in the maze.*

GREED

/ˈgrɛd/ n. a common jewel often set in stone

BY J. MICHAEL MATUSZEWICZ
Illustration by John Monteleone

THE ROAD BECAME A PATH, THE PATH A TRAIL, THEN THE TRAIL a track, and they had left even that behind some hours ago. The rocky ground fell sharply on either side of the rising ridge, and Alis's only experience with heights came from twice joining her peers on the undowered maid's platform during the yearly fairs. But she tempered her unease by watching Marlick's brilliant black robes a few steps ahead of her: When a wizard led the way, it had to be safe.

(Others in her village gaped in awe at the wanderers, and listened raptly to their tales of turning lead into gold and fighting fierce dragons; but she waited on them at the Inn, where they dug deep in their fancy costumes to find enough coppers for their wine and often fell over their own feet as they skittered away from the nightly brawl.)

To her left, a valley of rocks and gnarled trees squatted in dusk; to her right, foothills cast long shadows toward this root of the mountain. Behind, she knew she could find her way back to the village because it





edged the only patch of forest in a sea of yellow prairie, even though those few thousand of trees were now a smudge on the horizon.

The ground leveled a bit and Marlick stopped so suddenly that she bumped into him.

"I rest here," he said without turning. The remains of paving stones peeked out from under a scattering of rocks and moss; and the encircling curb looked as if it had been nibbled by giant mice. When the wizard stepped away from her, she saw a listing stone bench, one end missing, the other of black stone deeply grained. He sat on the high end, swirling his robe so that it took up the center, leaving her to squat cross-legged only the thickness of the seat above the rocks.

"What is this place?" she asked. "Was there a road here once?"

"Answers have value, girl," Marlick said. "What do you offer in trade?"

Idly, she picked up a stone and looked at it. The size and shape of a hen's egg, it was dark green and so smooth it looked to have once been polished. She tucked it into her sash — if she got nothing more for this day's walking, her brother could have this for his collection.

"Half," she said.

"Girl?"

"I will pay half. You promised rich reward if I came with you and did your bidding. Answer all my questions and you may keep half of that which you promised."

The wizard's laugh was dull, like thinking an empty cask. "Perhaps not a good bargain," he said. "What if you cannot do what I ask? What if the prize is that which cannot be halved, as like a great jewel? What if . . . there be many 'what ifs' in this world, girl?"

A weak breeze came to her, carrying a tang that crinkled her nose; but it was a crinkle of thought, for she knew that smell. A year ago, maybe more, a merchant came to the Inn, his clothes reeking with the same odor. But he was rich, rich enough to have four oxen to draw his wagon; and it was a wagon special-built, much like a barrel upon wheels. A barrel to haul . . . "Fish," she muttered when she finally remembered.

Marlick raised an eyebrow.

"I beg pardon," she said. "As for whether I can do your task: you would not have brought me this distance if you doubted. You would know if my reward cannot be halved, if you truly have an idea to pay me." She picked up a fragment of black stone and rubbed it between her fingers. "And I must think, what if you have brought me here merely so that you may rob me of my maidenhood and cast me into some pit far from home?"

A fuller, but no more friendly, laugh escaped him. "Girl, girl," he finally said, "I first took your eldest sister for two pieces of silver, and received her thanks besides. Think you I would spend a day's walking for that trifle?" He laughed again at his own amusement, and swirled the loose folds of his robe just to watch them flicker in the fading light.

Six years it had been since Janis went unwed her first time at the fair, and the Keeper of the Inn sent her to the attic rooms that very night. Alis remembered that time only dimly; she thought it unfair then that she scrubbed the kitchen and took on a share of Janis's serving to win berth and board while her sister lay abed all day, apparently doing nothing to earn her keep. But she recalled Janis crying for hours because of a bloated wretch who did ugly things to her that first night. Was it Marlick? Perhaps. There had been so many men mounting those stairs over the years before and since that they lost their faces and names.

Thinking of Janis reminded her of Sharis, middle sister. As soon as she set one foot on the maid's platform, she had been called, and married, fair-fashion, the boy who gathered herbs for the witch. That was the last Alis saw of her, for a herb-boy's wife did not have the coppers to eat or drink at the Inn, and Alis never found time between her scrubbing and her serving to visit the hut on the other side of the forest. A year and a day later, the witch, delivering the monthly potion that kept the attic girls barren, brought news that Sharis had died in childbirth.

Her own first year she knew not which to hope — that she be

called to slave as some poor crofter's wife, or that she return to the Inn, the only home she had ever known, and mount the stairs to the cold attic bed left empty a week before when a passing monk played so rough that not even the witch's ointments could heal the girl's wounds. There was no relief in her when the priest rang the closing and she walked home amid the merchants bundling up their wares, jewelers packing away their tools, and the sharpeners pressing everyone for one last game of luck. But the Keeper had bought a tall and strangely pale girl from a trader at the fair, so the bed was filled and Alis went on scrubbing and serving.

Last year, she dreaded only marriage, for there were no empty beds and travelers that season were so few the Keeper grumbled about having so many idle mouths to feed. But she stood with the other poor girls from noon till dusk with none being called.

Her luck, though, was at an end. In a sixday the priest would ring open the fair, and the herb-boy had been around to let it be known that he'd again saved the six coppers for a marriage-tithe. Even if she escaped him, the attic held two empty beds, and the road brought so many travelers this year the farm boys had started coming in before dusk on prayer-eyes to get their turns without waiting.

She flung the chip of black stone as far as she could, watching it fall into the valley shadows. "Will you answer?" she asked.

"I will answer," the wizard said. "Your prize can be halved; and I can afford the risk that you shall earn it."

"Was there a road here once?"

"I can show better than tell, girl," he said, rising. Without looking back to see if she followed, he walked to the far side of the level spot and began trudging his way up the ridge. She snorted, threw another pebble into the valley, and stood to follow him.



N HOUR LATER, WHEN THE RIDGE STOPPED rising, Marlick stepped around an upright stone and halted. Arms wrapped around herself because of the chill of dusk, Alis came to stand beside him. Water. More water than she had ever, could ever, imagine. To left and right it looked to be a long walk to where the glassy sheet met the mountains; straight ahead it went between walls of granite and lost itself in shadows and darkness.

"Is this . . . is this . . ." she said, hugging herself tighter. "Is this the sea?"

"Nay, girl, this is but a lake, a mere drop next to the great sea."

"But, there is so much of it."

"It spreads not so far," the wizard said, "and is no deeper than a tree is tall."

She shivered, not all owing to the cool breeze flowing off the expanse. It was enough to see the span of water, to imagine that it went as far down as a well, too . . .

"Fish," she said. "I smell fish."

"One goes with the other," Marlick said. "Where you find open water, you find fish." He kicked a pebble into the lake. She watched the ripples, the early stars riding the tiny waves. "This answers your first question, girl."

"What?" She turned to him, then followed his glance down. Black stones, closely set, paved where they stood, and ran off to left and right, framing the water like a fair merchant's elegant mirror.

"During the time of the Old King, this road encircled the lake and stepped down the ridge. There it met older ways, one leading to the west and the sea, another to the north. Your Inn was set as a water-

ing place a day's walk from here, as there is another village a night and a day's walk north of that, and so again and again and again until you reach the cleft of Orison, where you pass over the mountains to the Inner Kingdom."

"Did they come here for fish?"

"Nay, girl," the wizard said. "Fish are too plentiful in the world to spend a week's walking for them."

"Then why?"

"I say again, I show better than tell. Come, there is a short way before I rest."

The black pavers gleamed in the failing light, and the road, though level, wandered left and right as the only barrier between the dark water and the sheer drop to the plains far below. Despite her uneasiness about the height, her fear of the strange lake was more, and she kept to the outside edge.

She noticed a sound, as of water pouring from an enormous jug, just before she stumbled and fell to one knee.

"Tired, girl?" the wizard asked, stopping a few feet ahead and above her.

"No," she said, standing up and feeling to see if she had broken skin. "I did not see the road rise." She walked up the arch the road formed, and looked down at the source of the noise. A trough carried a waist-thick stream beneath them and down the side of the mountain. At the bottom it merged with silvery paths separating a patchwork of orchards and green fields that stretched as far as she could see in the moonlight.

"What is that?"

"The farm of Kierklen," he said.

"I did not know of anyone who lived this way."

"No one does, now. It is many fathers and sons long ago that Kierklen tore his fields from the prairie, and had no heirs to pass it to."

"The lake waters the crops," she said.

"I knew you were wise for your seasons, girl," the wizard said.

"Yes, the farmers here were much like those near your village, turning the soil and praying for enough rain to raise their turnips and cabbages. But Kierklen saw that a wet year made water flow down the mountain even when it was not raining, and he climbed up here to find out why. It was he who first saw this lake, though he did not name it." He pointed to the trough that the road bridged. "Kierklen cut that notch and built a dam across the old outlet of the lake so the water would always flow to his small holding. Soon he became rich, burned off the prairie grasses, and hired men from far and wide to dig ditches and line them with stone so his fields would never go dry."

"Why are the fields still green this late in the year?"

"Because he died doing the Old King a great service, though his death was, in itself, of benefit to him. As a gesture, the Old King laid that Kierklen's fields be forever free of weeds, suffer no blight, and ripen just in time for the Feast of the First Snow."

"But he is gone."

"Yes, girl, he is gone. Such is the way of men, that they pass on."

She watched as a shifting wind made the trees dance in the moonlight. What manner of trees were they? She could not tell from this height. Perhaps there were apples or pears, and she could come back to pick them for sale in the marketplace. Perhaps there were nuts, and she could grind their hulls for the tanners. Perhaps...

"Come," he said, and strode off again.

The Moon, a night from full, stood high before the road brought them to a wall that was the mountain. Piles of stones and half-standing arches remained of what must have once been a grand building, larger even than the Inn. Beside it, a straight-sided pit, its polished walls reflecting the moonlight, seemed to go down into the very mountain.

"I need light," Marlick said, stooping to pull a branch from a gnarled shrub that grew in the rubble. Raising it toward the Moon, he chanted softly and swiftly. Slowly the form of the branch began to glow, a yellow outline against the dark stone. The bark cracked and curled, revealing sapwood red with heat. Leaves shriveled,

twisting themselves into wicks. A final word and a thousand sparks flew from it and pale golden flames leaped from twig to twig until the whole was framed with light.

Alis held her tongue. She knew that wizards practiced sorcery, but never heard of one so blatant as to perform it in front of a witness. Did he mean to let her go after seeing this? But her fear gave way to awe; for though it blazed, the branch did not burn. She saw every part, every twig, plainly, only edged with fire as one would embroider an outline of the Holy Sword without obscuring the blade itself. Even the curled leaves were bordered with flame, but they were not eaten by it, did not blacken.

"Come," he said, holding the torch high. She followed him to the edge of the pit, and down a flight of stairs deep and broad. Although the water lay only a handspan lower than the road, no trace of it leaked through though they descended a man's-height below it. "This was the old path of the lake," he said when he reached the bottom of the stairs. "It flowed here for many lives of wizards ere the farmer stopped it up."

It was if some goddess of old had used an apple corer on the living rock, so round and straight was the tunnel that opened in front of them. In all her life, Alis had never seen a stone larger than two men could carry. Her mind knew the mountain had to be solid rock, but in her heart she felt she had been shrunk to an insect, invading the eye of some ancient statue.

"I rest here," Marlick said, walking into a small archway to the side, leaving her in the dark. She went toward the light, found him in a large room, its walls deeply carved with strange figures. "This was the guardroom of the stairs. And here," he said, picking up some lines hanging on the wall, "here is our supper."

Growing up at the Inn, she knew he could not mean to eat those strings; she served enough wizards meat and potatoes and flask after flask of wine to know they were not demons who were said to eat only sinews and drink only blood. A shimmer caught her eye, and a closer look revealed shiny wafers no bigger than a fingernail tied to the end of each line, just above a needle; but they were useless needles as they were bent, so point and thread looked in the same direction.

"Gather what wood you can find here," he said, winding the lines around his hand. "And fill the fireplace. I will return with food."

He left the torch behind and she began searching for wood, not expecting to find any. A few branches littered the corners of the room, but that did not even lay a decent-sized bed in the massive fireplace. She saw a twig sticking out of the crown of one of the carved figures, and pulled it, thinking it a bird nest. But it did not budge. When she reached around the head, she found it was a stout bough, only the tip of which showed. Other branches and pieces of broken limbs hid on the ledge behind the shoulders. Going from figure to figure, she found some bare, but others hid great loads of old wood that had settled on and behind their prominent features, much like the dregs of an herbal tea find their way into the cracks of an old teapot.

When she heard Marlick returning, the fire lay ready to light and she had a large pile to feed it through the night. She knelt beside it, hoping he would not ask her to use the sorcerous torch herself to kindle the fire.

He stepped into the room, carrying in one hand the lines with the strange needles, and in the other a string on which hung three flat shapes, the likes of which she had never seen.

"These are fish," Marlick said, holding the string high. "And not a bad catch for such a season." He flopped them down to the floor in front of her and busied himself with hanging the lines back onto the pegs where he found them.

She stared at the lifeless forms. They were oval, with one dead eye near the end; but the wondrous thing was their hide, for they were silver and mailed, as like the pictures of knights. The string ran into their bodies through a slit-like ear and ran out their mouths. Instead of legs and feet, small, transparent wings sprouted from the mail.

"I do not suppose you know how to clean and cook them, girl?"

"Nay," she said. "I've not seen their like before, though travelers at the Inn often speak of such beasts. From the talk, I thought them to be larger. As big as a man, they say."

"Some are, some are. The ones in the sea, they can be large. There are tales of fish that swallow men whole." He knelt and, from some fold of his robe, drew forth a long skinny knife. "Watch," he said. With three quick strokes he disemboweled the fish and cut the flesh from the mail. Alis watched him flick the guts and the mail into the fireplace. She wanted to touch it, to see if it was of iron, as was said of the knights, but fearfully kept her hands folded in her lap. "Now you do it," Marlick said, handing her the long blade.

Taking it, she hesitantly reached out to the closer of the two remaining fish. It was cold, oily, and did not feel like the clean, strong iron it resembled. The wizard's movements had been too fast to follow, but she had gotten the general idea, and pushed the knife through the body lengthwise to slit open the stomach. As she laid the knife between meat and mail, the wizard moved away from her.

When she finished, and had two pieces of clear white flesh laying beside his, she saw him thrust the torch into the stacked wood. The sorcerous fire leaped from kindling to branch to bough, and in an instant the fireplace filled with flame. It proved reassuring to her that, as she watched, the wood blackened as the fire ate into it, unlike the original branch, which still burned without burning.

"Good, for a first try," he said as he fingered the fillets she'd cut. "Perhaps, when our task is done, I'll buy you from the Keeper. You might be useful . . . at times."

"I am freeborn and owe no debt," she said. "I come and go and serve whom I please."

"Ah, then I wasted my coppers, for I paid the Keeper to send you on this journey with me."

"It was not wasted, for I must work for berth and board. Had he not given me leave, I would not have come, no matter what rewards you promised."

"So, well, what is done is done." He took the knife from her, sharpened two sticks, threaded the meat onto them, and propped them over the fire. "Clean the other. We eat soon."

With mild revulsion, she gathered up the guts and skin and tossed them into the fire as he had done, and pulled the remaining fish to her. Ever since she was old enough, she cleaned chickens for the cook, emptied the chamberpots of travelers who were sick, and, because her hands were small, was often chosen to smear the witch's bed paste on the pig's cervix to cleanse it after birthing; but she had never felt anything so utterly disgusting as the skin and flesh of these creatures.

Marlick toyed with the sticks that held their meal, turning them, pushing them closer to the flames, then drawing them back. She watched intently. In spite of all the stories she'd ever heard that spoke of fish as great delicacies, of the pain and trials men went through to catch them, of the great prices paid in the Inner Kingdom for fish from the sea, she doubted she could eat one. The smell that rose from them and the slime under her fingernails turned her stomach in a way she'd not experienced before.

"Eat, eat," the wizard said, pushing a stick at her so the now dark flesh was just under her nose.

Taking the stick from him, she watched him break off chunks of his own meal and stuff them into his greedy mouth. Spitfire ran down his face as he smacked and chewed. He finished by sucking his fingers clean, then skewered another fillet and set it over the fire.

"Eat, eat," he said when he saw that she had not touched hers.

Oil. Rancid oil. And a remembered smell of chicken heads left to spoil in a covered jar. That is what she tasted when she put a small piece of the flesh on her tongue. She spit it out, and brought the corner of her shift up to cover her mouth.

"What's this, you do not like?" the wizard asked. "Why, all the world likes it. There are those who would sell their immoral soul for a taste of fresh-caught fish cooked over an open fire. What is wrong with you, girl?"

"I am sorry," Alis was finally able to say. "I am truly sorry, but I cannot eat it."

Marlick shook his head, picked up her slice of fish from the dust where it had dropped. "Silly," he said. Wiping it off, he ate her piece with relish.

Alis crawled to a far corner of the room and huddled beside a deep carving of an elegant woman of old. She watched him finish cooking and eating all the meat. Not once did he turn to look at her.

When she awoke, the wizard still sat with his back to her, watching the fire. "Refresh yourself at the lake, then I go on," he said.

Sleeping on the cold stone left her back and legs aching, but she rose and left as quickly as she could. After climbing the stairs out of the pit, it took her a moment to nerve herself to approach the lake. Kneeling, she scooped up handfuls of water to wash her face, then more to drink. Only her hunger and thirst made her do it, for the faint smell of slimy creatures still twisted her stomach.

After going behind a pile of rubble for privacy, she stepped out to stretch and gather in what little warmth the dawning sun would give up. Sitting on a large stone, she pulled out of her sash a piece of cheese and a hardpan. "He says he'll feed you," the Keeper had said before he gave her leave. "But be best to take a bit along just in case."

"Girl! Girl!"

She slid off the stone, jamming the last piece of bun into her mouth, and hurried down the stairs to find Marlick standing in the dimness.

"I said refresh yourself, not go to sleep again," he said, not even looking at her. "There is much to do and I mean to see noon in Abaton. Do not speak again until we stand in the open. Understand?"

Alis started to open her mouth, then stopped and simply nodded. He turned to her. "I said: Do you understand?"

She nodded again.

It took but a moment before he smiled and snorted. "Maybe you do have some wit after all." He snorted again, not smiling, turned and walked off down the tunnel.



THE FLOOR GLOWED DIMLY, ENOUGH THAT SHE saw Marlick a dozen steps ahead, but not so much that she could make out the ceiling, or even much of the carvings on the walls. An hour they walked, then another, without a turn or bend or dip. The walls stayed exactly the same distance apart: brushing the portraits on one side with her fingertips, it took 12 plus three kitty-korner steps for her to reach those on the other.

When the wizard stopped, she came to stand a step behind him and to his left. In the distance, she saw a spot of daylight.

"Follow me exactly, girl, three paces behind," he said without turning around. She fell in behind him, being as quiet as she could.

The spot of daylight grew slowly, the floor sloped down, and the walls spread outward. It was only when she saw hills beyond the opening that she realized the ceiling had to be a hundred feet above them.

The Sun stood an hour fore noon when they stepped out onto a paving as large as the village square. The waist-high stone railing surrounding it was broken in only three places, to the left and right ahead where broad roads rose to meet it, and to one side where stairs climbed to an open porch cut into the side of the mountain.

"You may question now," the wizard said as he strode off toward the stairs.

A dozen quick steps brought her up beside him, and she took a dozen deep breaths of the clean air before she spoke.

"Why did the floor shine for us now, when all was dark last night?"
"The inn by the stair would have stood empty if merchants coming here could use the shaft after dusk," he said. "As it is, they paid a night's lodging for themselves and their packtrains."

Alis smiled at this, and remembered how, some years back, the Keeper paid an unholy sum to send packing a traveler who wished to open a second inn in the village. Is there anything an innkeeper won't do for profits? she thought.

"Why did I have to walk close behind, and without speaking? Was there danger?"

"That is the first test," he said. "That the one who comes to do the deed follow me without question."

"The first test? Are there others?"

"Many," he said. "And perhaps that is not the first. The one I need must be a virgin; and must not be stupid." But then he muttered something that sounded vaguely like: "Well, not too stupid."

They mounted the stairs and stood looking out over the valley. It reminded her of nothing so much as cold beef stew — dull gray-brown, with unrecognizable lumps just below the surface and specks of green and red poking out in strange places. And the brownness crept up the surrounding mountains, as if the valley had once been much shallower and slowly sank.

"Such is the city of Abaton in decline," Marlick said.

A butterfly worked its way across the vine-covered stone railing, and she watched as it landed on a small white bone. After a second, she jumped back. "Who is that?" she asked, hiding behind him and pointing to a skeleton all but hidden in the growth.

"Ah," the wizard said. "That would be Treval, a companion of old. Long on power, but longer on ego. He thought he could free the city with the Watcher still here."

"How did he die?"

"The youngest who served him said they stood here, just as we are now. A flame rose from the center of the city, a flame in dragon's shape. His master's face glowed in reflection. Then the dragon turned to face them. Without a sound, so the boy says, every bit of flesh burned from Treval's bones and his robes fell to dust."

Alis shivered. "There is sorcery here."

"But of course, girl," the wizard said. "Spells of death and destruction. Spells of wastings and plagues. Great spells laid long ago by masters of the craft and tied to a Watcher who will live past the end of time."

"Can you not counter the evil?"

"To the fox, the farmer is evil for not letting him dine on fattened fowl," he said. "Those who ruled here once thought to protect their city, little realizing that men come and go and others must use the world after them."

"How do you know it is safe to go on?"

"A wizard can intend to go no farther than this porch," he said. "That is why I brought you. You must enter the city, find the temple, and tell the Watcher that he may return to his master. When that one leaves, the spells will weaken and die."

"How do you know it is safe for me?"

Marlick snorted. "How safe is anything? How safe will you be if you run back to your precious Inn and spend your years in the attic, wondering when a monk will play too rough or a wizard will wither you? There are two roads leading down into the city. The one on the right holds a pile of rotting cloth, all that remains of a wench who set foot there. Take the road to the left. At every fork, at every corner, the way not to go is well marked."

She turned back to look out over the valley. "Where is the city?" she asked.

"Before you," Marlick said with a broad sweep to indicate the empty valley. "Abaton stood between two shafts, that by which we entered, and another that dives through the farthest mountain, opening on the South Reach of the Inner Kingdom. That is what made the city great, for it saved a week's walking between the South and the sea, and one could travel from South to North on this side of the mountains, instead of braving the Middle Forest." He leaned over the railing to point out a large hump in the middle of the valley.

"That is the temple, which the son of Kierklun built to guard the city he founded. From it he watched his city die, for he angered both his father and the Prince of South Reach, and they conspired to ruin him. The Prince plugged the shaft which dropped from Abaton; and Kierklun hired a wizard to make the lake climb from its banks and flow down its old passage. The tales say it took a month before the city was drowned, and someone, no lore tells who, cast seeds of sargos weeds into the new lake. Before the year ended, mats of vines so covered the surface that one could walk across, as if on dry land."

Alis could see now that the lumps were regular and spaced, as if bordering wide streets. "But the water is gone," she said.

"Yes, girl," the wizard said. "Some lives of men ago, the plug in the lower shaft was broken and the lake drained away, leaving the city under a thick blanket of weeds."

She studied the lumps, seeing them as buildings and houses, and tried to trace a path to the center.

"Is it not dark under there?"

"Dim, I am told," he said. "But the matting is old and threadbare."

"What if I cannot find the temple?"

"Others have found their way. Here," he said, taking a small white rock from his robes and handing it to her. "At every corner, at every turning, is either an arrow pointing the proper way, or a corpse marking the wrong."

She felt the little rock — it was soft, and she could press her fingernail into it.

"That is chalk from the seaciffs," the wizard said. "It leaves a mark when rubbed against other stones. Whenever you see an arrow, refresh it. If you come to a way where you see no guide, do not go forward, for an arrow must be there; only it may be faint, and rain may have seeped through to blur it."

Rolling the chalk between her fingers made her skin white. It took her a long time to ask her next question.

"What happened to the others who reached the temple?"

"They came back, as you must do," he said. "Do not mount beyond the fourth step without returning here and telling me what you have found."

"And then?"

"And then you must choose," he said. "If you wish to return home with nothing, so be it. If you want riches beyond your dreams, you will return to the temple and tell the Watcher to leave."

"Did all the others go home?"

Marlick shook his head. "No, some, a few, a very few, went back in. They never came out again."

"Why?"

"I do not know," he said. "You may, perchance, see markings warning you of dangers, just as you should try to warn others who may follow if you do not succeed. Keep a keen eye, for even the slightest trace may save you if you read it aright in time. And keep the chalk in your hands, any mark you make may save someone else."

"What else must I know?"

"Just this," he said. "As a stranger in the city, you may walk freely only where your business leads. You are on an errand to the temple, and must stay on the path to it. Enter no house, pass not even a hand through an open window, for the spells will see you as a thief and their justice is swift."

She stood for a long time looking at the blanketed city, picturing in her mind what it had been like: broad, paved streets; houses, perhaps whole neighborhoods, built of stone; and travelers from the sea lounging on every street corner. She could make out the squareness of some mounds far to her left; and others what must have been half-a-day's walk to her right. Being an orphan raised by the Keeper, her imagination knew no bounds, but the thought of an ancient city serving as a giant inn made her shudder.

"I may not force you to go," the wizard said. "But I have brought you far and given many answers in advance of your earning them."

"I will go," she said. "In truth, there is little you could say which could make me not go."

"The way is long," he said. "And I may not remain here after dusk."

She nodded, turned toward the stairs, then stopped.

"What of my payment?" she asked.

Marlick snorted. "Abaton was a great city, and charged rich fees for passage. The paths over the mountains are treacherous, so the few who escaped the flooding carried little away with them. It is said there are streets paved with gold, and the son of Kierklen found amusement in using jewels as large as hogsheds for doorposts. Once the Watcher leaves, you may take all that you can carry of all that you may find." He paused. "Or, rather, half of what you can carry, for I have answered all your questions as best I could and hold you to your bargain."

Walking down the stairs, she saw great heaps of the gray-brown sargos weeds just beyond the paving at the end of the tunnel. They reminded her of the banks of foam created when one dumps a bucket of wash water onto bare dirt. She wondered about it until she remembered the drifted wood in the guardroom where they passed the night. With the entire passage, 10 miles or more, filled with water, when the plug in the opposite tunnel was broken the outrushing must have been so fierce that nothing could have stood in its way.

Trying very hard to keep from looking at the right-hand way, and the corpse Marlick said laid there, she took a hesitant step from the green paving onto the gray road leading down into the city. For a hundred yards or more, the weeds left an open path wide enough for 50 men to walk abreast; then they formed a deep V for another hundred yards, at the bottom of which she saw a man's-height thickness of them suspended over the road, held aloft by walls of pink stone.

It took a dozen slow steps under the thick veil before her eyes adjusted to the gloom. The weeds overhead allowed a goodly portion of light to filter through, appearing to be made of thick ropes held apart by stubs of withered leaves and the twisting and knots of the strands themselves.

She feared the air would be chill and moist and carry the smells of a dead place; instead she found it vague: neither warm nor cold, not dry nor damp, and for the first time in her life she felt her nose as devoid of sense as her hair.

It surprised her that the walls looked clean and new, as if only just scrubbed. Wide openings without doors alternated on left and right, but anything behind them lay in total darkness. Only after the ninth such doorway did she notice that each was topped by a lintel of red stone graced with the likeness of an animal. She passed donkeys, mules, and even a long-necked horse with a humped back before she came to realize the buildings on either side were stables, each beast of burden relegated to its own section.

A waist-high post of green stone stood in the middle of the road when the pink buildings ended. The red globe set atop it bore a faint white arrow pointing straight ahead. She almost walked past it before remembering the chalk. As she rubbed the white stone along the dim marks, she wondered how many others had passed this way, and how many tries it took before someone found the right way. Alleys led off to left and right. At the entrance to one she saw a heap of what might have been half-rotted leather. A quick glance alone the other showed a skeleton stretched out, reaching toward some unknown goal.

For over a mile, she passed arrows always pointing straight ahead. The color of the buildings changed a dozen times. Gray stone, shot through with silver threads, marked the warehouses, their doorway carvings showing the proper places for bolts of cloth, swords, and many other things she could only guess at. Artisans built in brown, she saw, for their marks advertised the tools of goldsmiths, jewelers, and woodcarvers (though why a woodcarver needed an anvil amid his chisels, awls, and blades was beyond her reckoning).

She stopped at the first place where true roads, rather than alleys, separated the buildings, which were the first to rise above one story. The blanket of sargos standing high above her was so thin actual shafts of light reached the road. She wished some little breeze could also find its way in, for her nose picked out strongly the one thing in this entire city that had an odor — her own unwashed body.

She looked down for the arrow, but the street was clean. Neither did the walls on either side give any clue. The buildings across the way were of white veined with red and gold, and she hesitated

crossing to them to see if the mark might be hidden by their color. She looked down again, walking slowly side to side, but there was nothing to see. From gutter to as high as her toes would push her, she checked the structures left and right, and found nothing.

Standing at the edge of the intersection as if it were the brink of a cliff, she leaned forward and peered left and right. No mounds of cloth, skeletons, or other marks or traces showed that anyone had walked here since the floodwaters left.

Should she return to Marlick and tell him of the problem? He would probably just say she hadn't looked hard enough, and make her come back. He said he could not enter, so there was little hope of his help. It struck her suddenly — how did she know he could not enter? A wizard had been struck dead standing on that porch. What made Marlick immune, and could it not carry over to allow him passage? Or was it more likely that unknown dangers lurked here, and it was his nature to sit at a comfortable distance and wait for others to die in his service?

But all that was neither here nor there for her, now. Could she, in fact, return to safety? He said the spells allowed strangers to go where their business demanded — but did it allow for them to retrace their steps?

For lack of anything better to do, she got down on her knees and started examining the road while questions reeled through her mind. Finally, near the right-hand wall, she found five bits of crumbled chalk in cracks separating the paving stones. Three formed a straight line, while the last was flanked on either side. If she read it aright, there had been a line pointing right, with an arrow at that end, and someone — the Watcher? — had swept the street clean, leaving only the slightest traces in the chinks.

Using the chalk, she drew a new pointer where she thought the old one lay, and slowly stood up. Although not a fine lady who slept on down and never wore out linen slippers, she felt old and tired from the effort, and her knees complained of their treatment. Yesterday's walk, a night spent on cold stone, and a dozen or more miles today, all on scant rations, left their mark.

Since entering the city, she heard nothing save her own faint footsteps and shallow breathing. As she turned the corner and started down the new road, the sound of her heart loudly joined her ragged breaths.

SOME FEW DOZENS OF STEPS ALONG, SHE sighed in relief when she spotted an arrow in the middle of the street ahead. The houses on either side shrank to one story, and between the walls the sargos drooped so low she found she could reach that drear ceiling with her fingertips. A small cloud of gray-brown dust fell from where she touched it, and bits of dried leaves sprinkled her hair. She brushed them out, and a tinge of distress shot through her, for the patch of dirt she'd created seemed horrible on that so-clean street.

Kneeling quickly, she brushed up as much as she could and tucked it into her sash, then smoothed away the rest, forcing it between the pavers. She stood to check her work, dusted off her hands, took a deep breath and started off again.

Although the marks kept her on the same road, it curved in a broad arc. After an hour, or longer, for she could not see the Sun, she came to believe she was abreast of her first turning. The walls on her right were of white stone veined with red and gold, such as at the

intersection, and she had seen no other place where the stones repeated a color. The spiral grew sharper; even though the dimness kept her from seeing very far, she saw the walls curving ahead of her.

Twice more she believed herself to have walked full circle; and reached a point where a great wall blocked the path ahead. Going up to it, she saw, far down on the left corner, an arrow. Turning, she stopped in her tracks and gasped.

Five stories tall the temple stood: A cone of polished black stone threaded with silver, it served as the center pole for the golden strands of sargos tenting it. Gravings of birds and trees flickered in and out of sight with every slight movement of her eyes. Near the top, burning green jewels edged its single window.

Ten minutes or more she stood there, just looking at it, while her heart fluttered and she often forgot to breathe. No one in her village had ever been farther away than could be walked out and back in a day — that is why she had come with the wizard, to see that which only travelers saw, to feel what only travelers felt, and to have a story to share in the ale room. But deep in her soul she knew that no one had seen anything like this since ancient days, that no one had experienced the joy, marvel, and dread she felt at this moment, and that no one would ever believe her tale.

Her hesitant steps forward took her into a maze of waist-high statues. Birds, beasts, and trees bordered the way. Her fingertips found the translucent sculptures warm to the touch, and the mane of a rearing steed felt like silk. Ahead, she saw the temple sat on a series of rings, forming steps, and two thick rocks shaped like cushions rested on the lowest.

As she approached, the great lacework of stone which was the only door silently folded open. She stopped, and a young woman stepped out of the lower.

"Well met, and welcome," the woman called. "I am Lina." Taller even than a woodsman, she seemed to drift forward in her silver gown.

Alis swallowed hard, and walked to meet her.

"Well met, milady," she said. "I had not thought to meet anyone here." Only a few paces apart now, she hesitated again. From neck to hemline, the lady embodied femininity: small, perfectly formed breasts; long, slender arms ending in soft white hands; and hips that would be thought too narrow if the waist were not so diminutive. But from neck up, she held a boyish face framed in short, curly brown hair.

"I do not often come down," the lady said. "But I knew you would touch the temple and go back to your wizard, perhaps never to return."

"That is so, milady," Alis said.

"Please, sit," the lady said, gesturing to the lowest step. Alis saw that what she thought to be stones were in fact cushions of silk embroidered with gold. She kept herself from trembling as she sat, but only with an effort. The lady drifted down the last few feet and settled opposite her.

"Do you live here, milady?" Alis asked.

The laugh rang off the sea of sculptures surrounding them, and Alis thought she heard the calls of birds and the nickering of horses in the distance. "That fat fool of a wizard should have told you," the lady said when the echoes died away. "Did he not mention me at all? I am Lina. In the tongue of the Old King, that means 'the Watcher.'"

"Watcher?"

"Yes. That has been my task and my title so long that I have forgotten whatever other name I once had."

"Marlick spoke of a Watcher," she said. "But I did not know what to expect."

"Expectations are akin to anticipations, and neither fulfills their promise," Lina said. "But did you not think on it at all?"

"Not as such. I supposed that since the spells are tied to you, that you must be a witch, or a wizard."

"Nay, Alis, nay," she said. "For wizards are mortal, and their power dies with them. Witches only guide the powers around them, and cannot make lasting protections."

"Then, milady Lina, are you a goddess?"

From the look on her companion's face, Alis feared another laugh, but only a throaty chuckle emerged.

"Pretty little thing," Lina said. "Had you been so fortunate to grow up in a better place, even if it be a swamp, you would know better. There is only one who lives beyond mortal ken and can yet be tied to a place by a casting."

Alis swallowed hard, hoping to keep her heart from crawling out her throat.

"Yes, Alis," Lina said. "I am a demon." This time the laugh echoed off the distant mountains, and the statues all joined in with their cries and calls. When quiet finally returned, she turned to Alis, winked, and transformed. The boyish face now sported full lips and arching eyebrows, the hair grew blonde and so long that it swept the floor around her. The body changed also, the gown turning into a leather tunic and the slender arms growing as thick as tree stumps.

"At needs, I am whatever amuses me." Winking again, the transformation reversed itself, and Alis again sat near as perfect a woman's body as could be imagined. With faint alarm, she found the boyishness familiar. Like an artist at the fair might draw him as if he were without flaw, it was the face of the herb-boy. She buried her face in her hands and willed herself not to cry, or scream, or wet herself.

"Do not be frightened, Alis," the demon said gently. "If I meant you harm, you would have been dead ere you set foot in the city. And I have need of you yet, so you are safe."

"You, need me?" she was able to say.

"Twice over," Lina said. "For your coming here is dispelling my boredom, and that is the greatest burden for an immortal. And I would have it known, by a few, in the world that I and my kindred are not evil. We look into the hearts and souls of those we meet, and reflect it, but greater, as one singing near a well hears their song return to them many times over. Only those who live by fear and hatred need tremble before us."

With a greater courage than she knew she possessed, Alis lifted her face to look at the demon again. This time, Lina was all woman, from soft tresses to shapely foot.

"Now, now," the demon said. "You are a good, strong girl, and I am pleased Marlick chose you."

"Then you know why I am here."

"That fat fool of a wizard has been bringing people here for seven lives of men," she said. "In the early years I did not know of them in time; they made mistakes and were caught by the protections of this place. Since then I have been more watchful of the borders, and have spoken with many like yourself."

"I was told, that is, Marlick said to tell you, that you are free to go back to your master."

"Ah, yes, he would say that," Lina said. "Being of little wit, he never realized that my master has no need of me, for he is asleep and will not awaken for many ages to come."

"If you know you are free, why do you stay here?"

"Where else shall I go?" Lina asked. "This was my home for longer than you can imagine. I am happy here. The wizards are afraid to enter, and I tend the city as if it were my private garden."

"So I have come all this way for nothing?"

"Nothing? Is your life at the Inn so wonderful that it is not worth a day's walking to visit the grandest city this side of the mountains and to converse with a demon?"

"I meant no offense," Alis said hastily. "You see ... I only meant ... I mean ... you see ..."

"No matter, no matter," Lina said. "You set yourself a heroic task as like the legends of old speak of, and now that you are here things are not as you expected." She laughed gently. "Or were you perhaps thinking of the rewards that fat fool promised you?"

"Oh, milady, nay. I did not know he meant for me to steal from here."

"I know, Alis, I know, for I saw into your heart as you rested on the road. If such is your wish, you may choose as others have done: that is to lade yourself well and leave by the lower shaft, coming out in the Inner Kingdom, far from the reaches and mind of your wizard."

Alis managed a giggle. "In truth, milady demon, I had no hope of

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Take a horrific ride to the darker side of fantasy art.

BROM

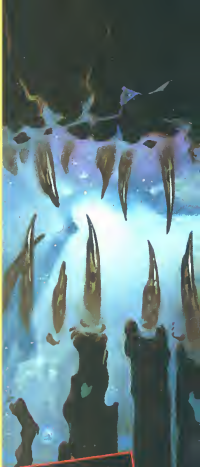
SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

BY KAREN HABER

WHAT WOULD BE CREEPY and perhaps cartoonish in the hands of a less skilled artist makes a profound sinister impression when it flows from the brush of Brom. The artist's mastery of line, detail, contrast, and in-your-face composition takes viewers on an often-disturbing journey to the darker side of fantastic art, a place populated by leather-clad fiends, tattooed ladies, and fallen angels.

Brom's punk-influenced portraits and morbid paintings have decorated book covers, trading cards, and role-playing games, breeding an equally morbid enthusiasm in his fans, some of whom have gone so far as to tattoo his imagery right into their own flesh. Over the phone he sounds disarmingly normal, and even admits to being superstitious and easily scared. It's oddly reassuring to learn that when he turns off the lights in the basement of his Pennsylvania home he races up the stairs. Who can blame him? If anyone knows what lies in wait in the darkness, it's Brom.

"I've always enjoyed scary movies," he says. "Even as a kid, watching from behind the couch with my fingers over my eyes. It's that morbid fascination. Everybody's drawn to cer-





The Harlequin made his
face known on Fast's game
book, Harlequin's Back.
LEFT: Sword in hand, this
woman is ready to haunt
the cover of Dungeon
Magazine.

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tain things that they like. I've just always liked things that are creepy and monster-oriented."

Even his children can gross him out. Sons Killian, 7 and Devin, 5, often join Dad in his studio where they produce their own artistic versions of his somber visions. Occasionally Brom suggests that his budding artists might want to cut back on the blood — just a bit — when depicting vampires. "I know they just paint monsters to humor me," he says. "My kids are probably so accustomed to my morbid aesthetic — I've got skulls all over the place — that they'll become accountants or dentists or something really conservative."

About the only real blood involved in his artistic process is the amount he sweats over his work. Not that every painting comes the hard way. "Some just fall into place. But some you have to beat with a stick."

HIS WEALTH OF REFERENCES results in part from a peripatetic childhood as an army brat whose only constant was his ability to draw and his fondness for monstrous subject matter. Brom spent his childhood on one army base after another, moving from Japan to Germany and most points in between. Once he discovered that his ability to sketch could ease the strain of constantly being the new kid in town, he devoted himself to drawing with a single-minded obsession. After high school he attended a commercial art school in Atlanta and almost immediately began working as a commercial artist. For several years he was delighted simply to be making a living from his artwork but eventually the thrill of rendering Coke cups waned. Luckily, the dark side of The Force called to him: "My older brother first introduced me to Edgar Rice Burroughs, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Robert E. Howard when I was a kid. I had read all the fantasies and I loved Frank Frazetta's artwork. I knew that that was the kind of work I wanted to be doing. So, in my not-copious free time, I put together a portfolio, sent it out, and that's how I hooked up with TSR." Brom spent several happy years in the TSR stable before embarking for the freelance life full time.

A personal high point came when Brom was asked to paint a cover for one of Michael Moorcock's Elric books. "I was thrilled because I was such a fan. It was one of those pieces that just fell into place for me, and I'm really happy with it. A painting is a success to me when a piece comes out very close to the image in my mind." Brom was so pleased with the painting that he used it as the cover for his own collected works, *Brom: Darkworks*, published in 1997 by FFG.

Unlike many fantasy illustrators, he doesn't rely on melodramatic color to make his effects. Using monochromatic color harmonies and contrast he achieves some of his



strongest emotional impact. Strong color, when it's employed at all, is used as accent: a splash of red blood upon death-white skin.

In *Sammuel*, the color is literally kept in the background, echoed lightly in the shadows under the character's eyes, and the edging of his jacket. In *The Harlequin*, Brom diminishes the impact of his reds by setting them against an orange backdrop, making contrast to the work by drawing the viewer's eye to the clown-white face of the subject. (In a nice bit of horrific imagery, Brom has morphed the rent in the wall so that it appears at first to be a mouth filled with sharpened teeth, or perhaps claws, and finally, demonic anthropomorphic candles and flames that seem like fiendish outtakes from the animated classic *Fantasia*.)

Brom's sympathy for his devils, monsters, and murderers is apparent in every painting he makes. "I usually try to paint characters that I would want to be if I had to be that person. What I aim for is some integrity behind the monster, the woman, or the guy, regardless of who they are in the story. And I'm always trying to get emotion in there.

Brom painted *Soulless* for a collectible card game called *The Brood* that never came to pass. LEFT: *Palladium's Night Bain* cover shows us a sample of Brom's twisted creatures and femme fatale in *Red Hand*.



ABOVE: A solitary guardian clings to a rooftop in *Nightbells*, a painting covering *White Wolf's* game book *Transylvania by Night*. RIGHT: Brom's use of light and shadow helps to create a menacing image in this untitled painting for the *Inferno* game box. FAR RIGHT: A lone man defends himself from Brom's twisted bestiary in this untitled painting for a recent *Inquest* magazine cover.





"I want to achieve an antique look that recalls the great illustrators of yesteryear and gives a sense of darkened varnish and accumulated years." He achieves this in the painting *Alone*, in which the subdued palette conveys the powerfully poignant emotions of the monstrous subject."

BROM CITES FRAZZETTA AS FIRST among his pantheon of artist-gods, followed closely by Richard Corbin, Michael Whelan, the Hildebrandt brothers, Jeff Jones, Norman Rockwell, N.C. Wyeth, Howard Pyle, and even a Pre-Raphaelite or two. "On top of that, add photography, music, and

film. I think when you're a creative person in general, it's all about input. Everything goes into your own little machinery and comes out with your own stamp on it."

One departure from the elder gods can be seen in Brom's treatment of women. Never mere displays of female pulchritude, Brom's muscular babes look like they mean business. For example, in *Lonestalker*, the subject appears capable of holding her own in any brawl in any barroom in any world. And in *Reckoners*, the very buff female warrior is definitely leading the boys into battle. "I don't want to do just standard babe painting," Brom says. "I really like the idea of

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Xena, WebRPG, D&D, and Dragonlance offer variety for the fantasy-lover.

WIZARDS OF THE COAST HAS LAUNCHED THE LATEST IN ITS LINE OF licensed collectable card games with the *Xena: Warrior Princess: Trading Card Game*. Based on the hit syndicated TV series, the *Xena: Warrior Princess TCG* uses cards inspired by the adventures of Xena, Gabrielle, and the other characters from the television show. The entire card series contains 180 cards displaying scenes from the show, some of which include famous quotes.

Xena: TCG uses WotC's new ARC system of rules. Designed as a quick-to-learn, fast-to-play, "lite" version of the original *Magic: The Gathering* rules, the ARC system completely succeeds in its goals. My wife, who had never played a CCG before, learned the rules in 10 minutes and we had finished our first game in another 15. Players keep a hand of seven cards, and at each turn put down a resource card. Enough resource cards allow you to play action cards, character cards, and combat cards. The goal of all three of these types are to make your opponent discard cards from their deck. The first person to run out of cards loses. WotC hopes to keep adding both licensed franchises and original worlds to the ARC system, keeping each set of cards fully compatible with all the others. Thus players could use a *Xena* deck in a game against a *Hercules* deck, or even a *C23* deck.

Starter decks for the *Xena: TCG* will contain 40 cards and retail for \$5.99. Booster packs will be "themed" and contain 12 cards for \$2.49. You should be able to find them in hobby, game, and comic book stores. My review deck contained a Gabrielle card, but I can't tell you if Callisto will be showing up in starter decks or expansions. If you are a long-time CCG player, then the ARC system will probably be too much like *War* for you to enjoy it, but if you're new to the world of collectable card games, and particularly if you are a *Xena* fan, then this is a fun and fast way to see what these card games are like.

WebRPG by WebRPG Inc. <http://www.webrpg.com>.

One of my favorite gaming tools, *WebRPG*, has just released version 2.0 of its software. *WebRPG* is not online gaming in the style of *Ultima On-Line* or *Game Storm*. It is a platform, free for the downloading, that allows you to play dice and paper RPGs over the Web. On one desktop, it gives you a chat space, an interactive map (with counters), and dice so that you can role-play with your friends, even if they live (like one of mine does) in Denmark.

WebRPG is a Java-based program that runs equally well on both Macs and PCs. It works over dial-up connections and over networks. It even works behind some firewalls. The program registers with the main *WebRPG* server, but each game is held in a virtual room that is hosted on the computer of one of the participants, usually the GM. The advantage of this remote hosting is that it cuts down on lag time, even if lots of games are in progress. To join the virtual room you have to be a registered user of *WebRPG*, but registration is free, automated, and very fast. When the host creates the virtual room for the game, he can leave it public, or he can put a password on it so that only the people you want to play with can get in.

Inside the room there is a file tree of resources available from the *WebRPG* server that include counters, terrain for the map, sounds, and an initiative tracker. Also on the desktop is a map that can be set for hexes or squares. In the chat space where everyone talks, players can change their

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log-in names and the colors their typing appears in (very handy). In the top left of the desktop is the dice tool for making rolls. There are hot buttons for dice from four-sided to percentile, but there is also a formula box where you can enter whatever combination of dice your game requires. For instance, the formula 1D6-1D6+10 produces a roll of one positive die six added to one negative die six and 10 added to the result. The capital "D" tells the program to re-roll sixes. This feature combined with the chat-room alone would let you play games, but combine it with the map so everyone can see where everyone else is standing, and you have a pretty good recreation of face-to-face role-playing.

In a couple of ways, *WebRPG* is actually better than face-to-face gaming. Take the character sheets. You can build them customized to the game you're playing, and you can include dice formulas and sounds on them. If the GM asks for a strength roll, you don't have to gather your dice and look up your strength, you just click on the button by your strength stat that rolls your strength check.

Another advantage of *WebRPG* is that the chat window contains a whisper feature. When whispering, a player's typing is displayed only to one other person instead of the whole room. Players and GMs can use this to trade information that the group at large wouldn't have, and players can use it to chat off-topic with one another without disrupting the flow of the game. Very nice if you have a comedian in the party.

Versions 2.0 of *WebRPG* solves most of the problems from 1.4.1. Items can now be dragged and dropped as well as cut and pasted from the toolbox to the map. In addition to changing the colors of the chat type, you can now also change the size of it, making it much easier to read. The map has been changed to allow for infinite movement, and now you can group items on the map and move them all at once. Unfortunately, you still can't draw on the map; you can only place counters.

The hardest part of role-playing over *WebRPG* still is having to type instead of talk, but I view this as a mixed flaw. It is harder to establish the rhythms of banter that you're used to having when talking if you are typing, but, on the other hand, play tends to stay more focused on the game itself rather than drifting into off-topic discussions. Combat, if more laborious to describe, can actually be easier to follow since there is a written record of what everyone has done and when he or she did it. Non combat discussions take some



getting used to since you are often responding to something the person typed two minutes ago, but if you are consistent about tagging who each comment is directed at, and if the GM gives a few beats to let characters oppose each other's actions then it all flows pretty smoothly.

If your favorite role-playing campaign is on hold because you or your gaming buddies no longer live in the same area, then I highly recommend having everyone download a copy of *WebRPG* and put your campaign back in business.

Tales from the Infinite Staircase: An Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Supplement for the Planescape Product Line. By Monte Cook. TSR, Inc. Renton, WA, 1998.

Despite its various financial ups and downs

and ups in the past five years, you still need a score card, a big score card, to keep track of all the franchises that TSR has going these days. *Planescape* is the latest, a background for use with the *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* rules set. The fact that there was more than one plane of existence to the mythos has been a conceit of *Dungeons and Dragons* since the beginning. Various adventures over the years have been set on planes besides the material one, but there has never been a concerted effort to make the many planes of the mythos the actual stomping grounds of a campaign until now.

The intended starting place for *Planescape* campaigns is the *Planescape* boxed set, but you don't need to make that \$30 investment to use *Tales from the Infinite Staircase*. If you already have an established *AD&D* (or any other fantasy) campaign but want to conduct an extended adventure in the planes beyond the material without moving your whole campaign there, then its ability to stand alone may be *THIS*'s biggest selling point. On the other hand, if you have spent the money for the *Planescape* boxed set and its other supplements, then you will probably be glad to finally have a book that gives you a plot to go with all that background you've invested in.

The center point of *THIS* is the Infinite Staircase itself. Like Sigil, the City of Doors, from the boxed set and the *Planewalker's Handbook*, the Infinite Staircase is an artifact that facilitates travel between the planes. Entered from the Gates of the Moon on nights when the Moon is full, the Infinite Staircase looks like Steve Ditko's version of limbo with staircases and landings hanging anchorless in the ether, seeming to lead everywhere and nowhere all at once. In reality, the Infinite Staircase is rooted in creativ-



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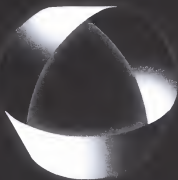
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ity and development. It reaches out flights of stairs to wherever creative endeavor is exercised. As the adventure opens, an insane sorceress has entrapped her former lover and managed to set a demon loose on the Staircase in the process. Hired to release the lover, the characters must also deal with the demon. If they can pull that off, they are then asked to look into the mystery that will occupy them for the other seven adventures that make up the book.

The most common weakness in published scenario packs is their linearity. Events have to play out in a certain order, each encounter leading to the next, all too much like a "choose-your-own-adventure" book or a computer RPG. This linear progression is bad because it treats players like actors playing scripted roles in a drama, rather than letting them be the authors of their own adventures. If the game master has enough options and background, even when he has to ad lib because his players have done something the author never covered, the GM can guide the players back to the adventure's goal without having to strong-arm them.

Monte Cook does a good job of covering a lot of possibilities and inserting a lot of background. *THIS* is a thick, densely written scenario pack. Perhaps the most impressive part of it is that after the first adventure, the next seven can be played in any order. They are all connected and events in one adventure influence conditions in the next, but how that influence manifests is different depending upon the order in which each adventure is completed. Cook puts in detailed notes right up front to help the GM keep track of what the set-up of each particular adventure will be depending upon what the characters have already done.

The adventures themselves are more linear than the *hyper*-plot of the module, but again, there are a lot of backgrounds and alternatives. It is worth repeating that one of this module's greatest strengths is that you don't need all the other *Planescape* materials to play it. Every creature, every demon, every NPC has a capsule description with its powers, weapons, stats, attitudes, background, and tendencies laid out in the text. There is no need to flip open any other reference book while you are running the adventures.

My only complaint is one of personal taste and has to do with the whole *Planescape* mythos as opposed to just *THIS*. I don't like the names in *Planescape*. I don't like the names and the jargon. In the Planar Common tongue, people aren't just fighters and thieves, they are bashers and cutters. The module is written using these terms plus a few dozen more. Not constantly; you don't always need a glossary to understand what is going on, but it doesn't hurt to have one handy. My experience is that you spend more time trying to remember jargon than you do envisioning your character and his surroundings. Still, this is a personal complaint and a problem you may not have.



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All in all, *Tales from the Infinite Staircase* is a detailed, inventive collection of role-playing adventures that will take you all over the known planes of the AD&D mythos, introduce you to the *Planescape* campaign world, and give your players a startling new cloth on which to play.

Dragonlance: Fifth Age: A Saga Companion. By William W. Connors with Steven Brown and Skip Williams. TSR, Inc. Renton, WA. 1998. \$13.95.

Once upon a time errata used to be published on slips of paper that were tucked into the boxes with the games. Then Games Designer Workshop put out a game called *Chivalry and Sorcery*. These books were published with such poor play testing and proof-reading that simple sheets weren't enough. A whole book of errata was required, and the "Companion" book was born. Generally, Companions are followed in a year or so by a new edition, which incorporates the errata from the Companion book and provides a base to start gathering new errata for a new edition of the Companion. And so on.

The *Dragonlance Fifth Age Saga* rules are about a year old, and so now it is time to publish their Companion. Called *A Saga Companion*, this 128-page book contains a lot of information, much of which probably should have been in the original edition. Reading over the Companion, you have to wonder why topics such as creating a hero's background (including his mundane talents), rules for creating spell books and magic artifacts, and tips for being a better game master were left out of the original rules. Other topics such as new weapons, monsters, and a quick play system for magic are more traditionally the fodder for supplements. It is the difference between giving the players more of what they already have and giving them what they should have had in the first place.

It is an inherent problem in trying to sell errata books like *A Saga Companion* that gamers are by nature creative. Having already played the system with its flaws for a year or more, most gamers will have already made up their own house rules to cover the gaps that the Companion addresses. The commercial success of the book depends upon how many customers prefer to keep their own rules rather than shell out the money for the "official" ones. I can say that the rules presented in the Companion seem thorough and in keeping with the rest of the *Saga* system. They may even work better than what players have found for themselves. I doubt that very many groups have created their own rules for enchanting objects.

A Saga Companion is a useful, but not critically needed, addition to the *Saga* rules. My advice is to look over the Table of Contents and see if there is anything there that you or your group has been wanting rules for. If so take the plunge. If not, just hang on for the second edition. ♦



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ABIDETH

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lying. The bobbing sunhat was down at the other end of the garden. "Her grandfather saw them — built the house for them."

Madeleine let her breath out in a long sigh. "One of my governesses saw ghosts," she said. "I never did. I told my father — a big mistake — and he sent her away. I wanted so much to bring her here."

Cynthia wasn't sure how to answer. She just stared at Madeleine, who stared back, her face still blank, her thin arms still wrapped around her bony knees. Cynthia realized the time was past for Madeleine to run shrieking back to the party, to tell the girls about Cynthia's lie and get them all to laugh — and she realized that Madeleine was talking to her like a normal person, just like she had talked to the maid, and to Wallace and the others.

"I'm sorry I lied," Cynthia said.

Pink spots glowed in Madeleine's flat cheeks. "They're creeps," she said, pointing up at the house. When Cynthia nodded, she said, "They're just as creepy to each other." She got up and brushed her skirt off. "I wish I knew whether they don't see the fairies because they can't, or because they won't."

"Wallace's grandmother and her sister wanted to travel around the world and see if there were any more places like this," Cynthia said.

"There have to be," Madeleine responded. Which meant that Madeleine, the world traveler, hadn't found any. But maybe she wasn't allowed to look, Cynthia thought.

"No," Madeleine said as she stepped up onto the bridge beside Cynthia. "There are. We just have to find them."

Cynthia heard herself saying to the grandmother, "I want there to be lots and lots of them." She wondered if Madeleine, too, had read every book she could find about fairies, and had made up stories about them in her mind. She wondered if she believed in magic, if she looked for it even when she didn't believe in it — like pretending Christmas lights are colored snowflakes when you take off your glasses.

Then she realized that Madeleine had said "we" and not "I."

They stood there side by side and looked down at the graceful sprites in their unending waterdance. It was getting hard to see them, for the westerner Sun was making a mirror of the water's surface.

Cynthia looked directly below, saw the cool dark silhouette of the bridge, and on it two identical girl outlines. Cynthia thought about her mother sitting by the phone, still in her nice dress, the borrowed car still outside, waiting in hopes Cynthia would be invited to someone's grand house for something besides one of the birthday parties.

"Want to come over to my place?" she said. ♦

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DR. RUMPOLE

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And soon, all too soon, they came to the door and carted him away.

THESE DAYS, I DON'T HAVE TO PAY FOR rewrites anymore. Dr Rumpole sits in a very gothic-looking cell, without windows and without companionship. He helps me out just to have someone to talk to; and I bring him cookies sometimes. He hardly even speaks to the guards; his mind has turned inward. All he ever does now is remember. He hardly needs the prison walls; he has made his own Hell.

Last week, he wrote a stunning miniseries about Buchenwald. It's odd, because the villain he depicts, the horrifying commandant who rapes, maims, and kills without compunction, seems curiously sympathetic. It's almost as though he gets into the monster's mind. And toward the end, when he recapitulates the monster's childhood dreams...

At least four Emmys in the bag with this one.

"Elena works for me now," I told him. "Fancy that. She even has to visit the mailroom from time to time. That's what I call a fairy tale ending."

Dr Rumpole smiled sadly. "Next time," he said, "bring the oat nut ones. I'm tired of chocolate chip."

"We're working on your appeal," I told him. "Soon, you may even be able to fly back to America."

"It's good of you to visit," he said, "but please, no more chocolate chips."

I waved for the guard. The heavy doors clanged shut. There is a filthy wormhole of a corridor that ends in an elevator; I punched a secret code and went straight up to my penthouse.

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I glanced at the nubile creature draped on the couch, and paused to admire my wall-sized Hockney. Wasn't I myself the ultimate triumph of Hollywood sleight of hand? I was a phony screenwriter who had won three Oscars, I was a bogus producer, I had a hairpiece, and I was a fake studio head just marking time until the real honcho crawled out of that brothel in Bangkok. So many illusions... and yet... how real I felt, how alive!

I stepped out of my medieval castle onto the balcony, and breathed in a heady lungful of the smog-filled air. It's a wonderful life, I told myself, and tried to forget the old man in the cellar. ♦

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combining something beautiful or sexy with something disturbing or strong. I like to create that tension.

"I try to draw and paint out of my head as much as possible, but if the subject is very realistically human, it helps to have really good references. However, with monsters, I can really have fun with them and exaggerate." One can only imagine the fun he had with images such as *Helexa*, *The Weird*, *Grafter*, and *Teutonic*.

Brom's creative process begins with 10 or 15 loose thumb-nail sketches that allow him to experiment with gesture and composition. From there he often moves into the actual painting. His supports and textures may vary, depending upon his mood: He's used masonite, illustration board, and canvas. What doesn't vary is his next step: a quick-drying acrylic underpainting to establish the darks and tone. Next, he goes in with oils to achieve the subtle soft blending and pull out all the details. Varnish finishes the piece.

"When I first left art school I was using straight airbrush. And then I tried acrylic. But oils are wonderful to me because they're very forgiving. I can scrub them out, change things, and the oils sit on top of the acrylics without any problem, although you can't do the reverse."

During his creative process Brom listens to a broad range of music and books on tape. Although he enjoys the work of Stephen King, Anne Rice, and Clive Barker, he says that he's not solely drawn to gruesome fiction. "I prefer things that are dramatic rather than straight horror."

In fact, fans of his dark imagery may be surprised to learn about his creative versatility: He recently painted a cover for an Anne McCaffrey book, *Master Harper of Pern*. "I really enjoy painting any subject. I wouldn't turn down an assignment just because it wasn't horrific."

Part of that versatility extends to the use of computers in his work. "I recently just repainted the center of a painting on computer—the first time I've done that. But I'll never work solely on a computer. I really like the feel of paint on board. I may reach a point where after a painting's finished, I scan it into a computer, touch it up, and send it on its way. But a computer's like any other tool: it's got its pros and cons."

Brom relaxes by working on a novel that he hopes to illustrate eventually. The subject? Dark fantasy, of course. "The ultimate to me would be to write and illustrate my own stories. That's almost as far as you could go in an individual project and maintain control. If I could simply write and illustrate, that's pretty much what I would like to do. As I get older, I realize that variety in subject matter and medium are what keep things interesting." ■

GREED

Continued from page 73

his rewards in any case. I mainly came to escape my own boredom."

Lina smiled and started to reach out to take her hand, but left the motion unfinished. Alis stiffened and felt her skin prickle. Knowing this to be the best thing she had ever done, but not knowing why, she extended her own hand and their fingertips met.

As if touching a hot stove, the sensations raced to her mind, not in pain, but with understanding. Instantly, she knew the city. From Farmer Kierklen's desire to water his crops in high summer to Wizard Marlick's lust for the long-abandoned riches, Abaton was the bastard child of greed. Even the beauty of the city grew from the citizens' passion to possess the finest, whether it be buildings, jewels, or sculptures; not to simply own them for their own sake, but to deprive the rest of the world of these treasures.

Between the time the son of Kierklen found the swampy valley until his father's hatred drowned it again, money and power laid stone upon stone until the city stood as the greatest monument to avarice ever known in the mortal realm.

Abaton itself, Alis knew, was blameless. The city stood as a fine lady, but the toll collectors, merchants, and innkeepers used her as a harlot, never seeing her beauty and grace, for their eyes were blinded by the gold, silver, and precious rocks she brought them.

If there was any fear left in Alis, it drained, and sorrow filled her. Bravely she kept back a tear.

Then new visions flooded in, ghosts of things past dimmed as she beheld Lina's dream for the city: the rough coverlet torn away, Abaton, clean and repolished, standing tall and proud as a guidepost and refuge to weary travelers.

The works of a thousand stone masons stood ready to house joyous citizens. The crafts of a thousand artisans lay waiting to serve new masters. The mindsprings of a thousand artists stood proudly to enliven tired souls.

But it had to wait, wait until a time when wizards no longer prowled the world in search of power, when gold no longer enslaved men's hearts, and when joy, beauty, and contentment became the most precious things in the world.

Whether from Alis's own fear, or Lina's conducted to her, she knew that such a time lay in the unseeable future, if at all, and it would be a time when there was no more need of demons to walk in sunlight.

Sorrow washed over her again. Although she knew no more of the great powers than came by tasting witch's potions and hearing tales of wizard's sorcery, the thought of a time with no magic in the world saddened her.

"I name thee friend, to the city and to myself," Lina said. She stood, and lifted Alis

to her feet. "But it is time for you to go back, for Marlick grows impatient."

"What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him it is not the proper season," Lina said. "That is the truth, though he will misconstrue it. I am waiting for a season of change, when the Old King awakens, before I leave my home. But he need not know that, and in deep winter he may bring another to break my boredom."

"I thank you, milady demon, for your kindness."

"Remember, well, Alis, that we demons only reflect what we find." They walked through the statues and stopped at the road. "Take a dozen paces the way you came, then turn to your left. The road will take you straight out of the city without walking the long spiral. It is much less tiring."

"Thank you again, milady," she said. She took one step, then turned back. "Milady demon, Lina, would it be possible, I mean would you not take offense, if I should return someday, to speak with you again and to see more of the city?"

"Only bend your thoughts to me a day before you set out, my little demon-friend, and I shall have food and wine waiting for you."

"Until then, milady, well met, and my many thanks."

"One last thing, before you go," Lina said. Reaching into her gown, she drew out a stone the size of a pigeon's egg. "Give this to your brother for his collection; it is glittery and more to a boyish heart than the one in your sash that you found on your way here."

Alis removed the almost forgotten green rock and compared it to the new one. "You are right," she said. "Yours is more like those he already keeps."

"You may tell him that it is a popular stone, but from a very unpopular place."

"And that it is a gift from a demon?"

"Yes," Lina said, laughing. "You may tell him that, too, if it will not frighten him. But do not cast aside the green one, for it is jade, which is no longer common in the world. The jewelers at your little fair will give you much for it, enough that you may dower yourself, or live at the Inn as a guest for a year or more."

"I cannot speak of that in my heart," she said.

"Go," Lina said quietly. "Go before I begin to think you should stay."

Alis turned and walked down the road. When she reached the edge of the city, where the canopy of sargos ended, the Sun was half-hidden behind the peak of the mountain and she saw Marlick pacing in shadows. He spied her at that moment and leaned over the railing. If he called to her, his words were lost in the gentle breeze that sprang up from behind her.

She went straight for the entrance to the tunnel, and saw out of the corner of her eye that Marlick hurried down the steps when he saw she was not going to meet him.

Let the fat fool tag along three paces behind, she thought as she stepped into the darkness. ♦

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Contributors

CONSTANCE ASH LIVES AND WORKS in New York City with her husband, Ned Sublette. She's published three fantasy novels and several short stories. Currently she's at work on a South Carolina plantation historical fantasy, and a novel based on her North Dakota family history. She's the editor of the original SF anthology *Not of Women Born*, *Reproductive Futures*, forthcoming from Roc.

Web Bryant's artistic skills cross many disciplines in commercial art. The graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University was part of the design team that created *USA Today*. Other achievements include art directing the first national children's newspaper, *Pennywhistle Press*; creating national award-winning maps and graphics; and being commissioned to paint portraits of a Supreme Court Justice and corporate CEOs.

James Van Pelt teaches high school and college English in western Colorado. His fiction has appeared in, among other places, *Pulphouse*, *Aberrations*, and *Analog*. His stories have twice been included in the honorable mention list of The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror. *Tangent* magazine has printed two of his non-fiction essays that explored the effectiveness of professional writing affiliation, and the impact of mainstream influences in genre fiction. Upcoming work will appear in *Worlds of Fantasy and Horror*.

S.P. Somtow was born in Thailand and grew up in Europe. He is the author of some 40 books including *Vampire Junction* and *Jasmine Nights*, both of which have been optioned and are experiencing development hell. Somtow also writes music; his ballet on a fantasy theme, *Kaki*, received a royal command gala performance in Bangkok last year. Somtow's latest novel is *Darker Angels*, a novel about African magic during the American Civil War.

David Beck has produced twelve paintings for *Realms of Fantasy and Science Fiction Age* in the past few years. He is currently at work on the 25th anniversary of Universal Picture Theme parks. He has also worked on *Dragonheart* through Hasbro, Inc., as well as pro-

jects for *U.S. News and World Report*, Boy Scouts of America, NFL Properties and Warner Brother Pictures. The Grateful Dead own thirteen or more of his pieces.



Steve Adler



David Beck

SHERWOOD SMITH STUDIED HISTORY and languages in college, lived in Europe one year, and has worked in various jobs ranging from tending bar in a harbor tavern to a stint in Hollywood. Married almost 20 years, she has two kids, a dog and a houseful of books. She is currently a teacher. Sherwood has over a dozen books out, from space opera to children's fantasy. Current publications include *Court Duel* and *Derelect of Trade*. Her most recent short fiction is *Mastery* which appeared in *Wizard Fantastic*.

Steve Adler grew up in Peekskill, NY. He attended the Rhode Island School of Design from 1980 to 1983. He spent his final year abroad, studying art in Rome. Steve has been an illustrator for more than eleven years and recently moved to Virginia. His clients include Microsoft, Time Magazine, United Airlines and Sony Music.

J. Michael Matuszewicz has been a lot of things over the years: fry cook, truck driver, machinist. He has a mother in Alaska, and an ex-wife, daughter, and three grandkids in Nebraska. He is writing the first half of a novel, has a passion for clocks, and his religious endeavors never quite turn out. He refuses to part with a photo of himself because though he does not truly share the aboriginal beliefs, his soul is too precariously perched to take any chances.

John Monteleone has been a professional illustrator for the past ten years, working for such impressive clients as Time Warner, 20th Century Fox, Scholastic Books, The Franklin Mint, The Hamilton Collection, and most of the major publishing firms. His use of dramatic light source and sharp realism have caught the eye of the Science Fiction and Fantasy community. Certified to teach Jeet Kun Do, he combines his knowledge of combat with his realistic painting style in his first book, *Creatures in Combat*. 14



Constance Ash



James Van Pelt

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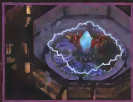
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